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Jack-o'-lantern

Mary Theresa
Waggaman



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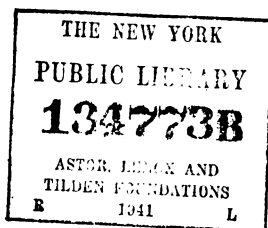
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JACK-O'-LANTERN.

BY
MARY T. WAGGAMAN.



NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO:
BENZIGER BROTHERS,
[1893]
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Printed in the United States of America.

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RECEIVED APR 16 1941

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JACK-O'-LANTERN.

CHAPTER I.

A FLIGHT.

"MOUNTAIN air," said Doctor Doane, as he scribbled the prescription-paper on his broad knee—"Mountain air is what the boy needs, madam. You may give him this mixture three times a day," and the great medical oracle handed the bit of folded wisdom to the anxious mother; "but it is not physic the youngster wants. It is mountain air, and plenty of it. If you keep him in this malarious atmosphere during the heated term—well, you must take the consequences." And the famous doctor rose with the air of a man who knows his time to be worth a dollar a minute; and patting Dickie's golden head, hurried

away quite regardless of the knell he had left sounding in the loving mother's ear—the icy chill of fear he had sent to her loving heart. Mountain air! The doctor talked as if it could be bought at sixpence a bottle. Mountain air! when the great breezy peaks over which swept the life-giving elixir were one hundred miles away; when, besides Dickie, there were four sturdy, active young Lindseys bursting buttons and outgrowing frocks in a way that kept mamma's fingers busy from morning until night, while their healthy appetites made papa's monthly bills very serious mathematical problems indeed. Mountain air! when this pretty little bird-box of a house was leased for three years, and there were just twenty dollars cash in the family purse for possible contingencies.

“Is consequences bad to take, mamma?” asked blue-eyed Dickie, evidently reflecting on the doctor's parting words. “Is it worse than cod-liver oil?”

“Oh, yes, my baby, my baby!” answered his mother, clasping him to her breast and hiding her face for a moment in his curls.

For Dickie had been ailing weeks now, and the blue eyes had a starry light, the little face

a waxen color that made her sick and faint with mother fear.

"Mamma, dear mamma, what is the matter? Are you crying, mamma?"

"Crying?" said mamma, lifting her face with a pitiful little laugh. "Crying? Not a bit of it. Why should mamma cry, my Dickie-bird? Come, let us go down-stairs and see if your baked apple is done. Mam' Patsy will cover it with nice cream, and then—"

"Oh, I don't like baked apples," said Dickie wearily. "I don't like cream. I just want to lie down on the sofa. I am so tired, mamma, so tired."

And the little form sank wearily back among the cushions, the waxen lids closed, and Dickie, who had always looked as if he were a little angel astray, seemed only waiting God's whispered call to spread his wings and fly.

"Oh, I must take him away! I must! But how—how?" thought the tortured little mother as she hopelessly surveyed the question of ways and means from every point. "My baby, my baby! I cannot give him up."

And dropping on her knees by the sleeping child, she buried her face on his pillows and wept softly and unrestrainedly, as she prayed that God would spare her darling.

But quiet prayers and tears are luxuries not reserved for the mothers of five. Screened by the woollen table-cover under which he had retired to surreptitiously demolish the last new magazine, Rogue Robin surveyed the pitiful scene with wide-open eyes of dismay. Rogue Robin was just six, with a tangle of auburn curls falling over a milk-white brow, and the face of an adoring angel.

Yet not undeservedly had Rogue Robin received his pet name. Behind that cherubic visage lurked the veriest imp of mischief that ever ran rampant in a household. There was little that Rogue Robin had not tried within his brief but active career. He had been rescued from a polar exploration on the roof of the house, dragged by the heels from the nursery chimney, caught by the waistband as he was making a downward flight from a third-story window, and extracted by a benevolent bachelor's umbrella-hook from the neighboring sewer.

So often had he been "brought back" by the friendly grip of the law from fights, fires, funerals, circuses, and all public functions attended with horses or music, that Officer Magee at the corner was on most cordial and paternal terms with him.

"Kape to your bate, Rogue Robin. I've got me eye on ye," was the cheery reminder.

But roar, fight, and shout as the Rogue could and did in all emergencies, he never cried. Therefore as he peered out of his hiding-place to-day with the last page of the demolished magazine in his hand, and saw mamma, whose unfailing smile made the sunshine of the home, in tears by Dickie's side, terror seized upon him. He scurried unseen from the room and slid down the banisters just in time to thump into sixteen-year-old Fred as he came rushing in to lunch.

"Look out, there ! What's the matter with you, Rogue ?"

"Dickie's dead," piped Rogue Robin mournfully.

"What ?" gasped Fred, his rosy cheek paling.

"Dickie's 'most dead," repeated the Rogue,

inserting a saving doubt. "And mamma's a-praying and a-crying awful."

"Why—why—he was up this morning," said Fred. "What has happened?"

"I don't know," said Rogue Robin gravely. "The doctor came and said he must have mountain air, and I guess he can't get it. And he won't eat baked apples or cream or anything, and mamma is crying, and he must be going to die. I say, Fred, do you think they'll take me to the funeral?"

"Hush up that, you little scoundrel, or I'll shake the life out of you!" said Fred fiercely. "Where are Tess and Lou?"

"Down in the dining-room. Fred, will Dickie have a hearse with white ponies?"

"You'll have a thrashing in about two minutes if you don't let up that ghoul talk," said Fred, collaring his small brother wrathfully and swinging him into the dining-room, where his pretty sisters, Tess and Lou, stood in solemn conclave with Mam' Patsy; for the doctor's fiat had thrilled through the family like an electric shock, and Dickie-bird was the darling of all.

"Jes' wat I ben telling yo' mar all 'long," said Mam' Patsy, who, having "nussed" all

five young Lindsays, was high and infallible authority. "I says pintedly, 'Miss Nell, dat ar chile is a peaking nachally away. Folks may talk as dey please, but I nebber seen a boy wif a blue vein ober his nose rizzed yet.'"

"And has Dickie a blue vein over his nose?" asked Tess breathlessly.

"Dat he has, chile, dat he has," said Mam' Patsy, nodding ruefully, "and more'n dat, he nebber tumbled out of bed in his life—jest lay quiet and easy, even wif dat ar Rogue Robin rolling plumb ober him. It's de wustest kind ob luck when a chile won't fall out ob bed nohow. I allus felt easy about Rogue Robin, fer he turned ober his cradle three times, besides tumbling out ob his ma's bed and breaking his collar-bone. You, Rogue, you"—Mam' Patsy suddenly broke off in her remembrances—"Lord bless dat chile; if he ain't eatin' ebberry bit of Dickie's apple!" and she made a dive into the kitchen after the small marauder, who was smilingly licking his creamy lips after the last stolen spoonful.

"You horrid little wretch!" said Lou indignantly.

"When your poor darling little brother is dying up-stairs," said Tess tearfully.

"Oh, let up, girls!" growled Fred, feeling that the clouds were getting altogether too heavy for boyish endurance. "What's the good of croaking like ravens? Dickie isn't dead by a long shot, and he isn't going to die either. If the doctor says he wants mountain air, why, he has got to have it."

"But how?" asked the girls.

"Oh, well, somehow," answered Fred vaguely. "When a thing has to be done, why, then, you just have to go and do it."

"We'll pray," said blue-eyed Tess softly. "Let us go 'round to the convent chapel, Lou, this evening and pray. And maybe," added Tess, who had sweet, wise fancies all her own, "St. Joseph will show us some way to 'fly into Egypt,' as he did, and save our little Dickie."

"He will have to show us a pocketful of money as well," said black-eyed Lou, with a nod. And Fred's heart sank again as he agreed with her.

Altogether it was a dreary luncheon, for a shadow rested upon the little household that seemed to chill their sunlit sky.

Far away indeed, as yet, but still above their happy home, hovered that mighty, dark-

winged angel whom mortals know and fear as Death.

"Mountain air!" thought Fred as, clapping on his hat at last, he turned out again into the hot, baking streets. "Gee whiz! this feels like it."

For the July sun was blazing down like the midsummer tyrant that he was, and the trees stood up like still, painted things against the glaring blue of the sky. Not a twig or leaf stirred; not a roving cloud dared show itself; the fierce sun-king was ruling with despotic sway. Even the great office-rooms of Judson & Judson, where Fred earned a little money by doing odd job work during the summer vacation, felt still and breathless to-day, and the clerks loosened their neckties and mopped their brows as they bent over rent-rolls and titles.

"You can tick off the ads. this evening, Freddy," said Mr. Chumleigh, motioning to the typewriter. "Dixon's got an incipient sunstroke and gone home. Twenty new advertisements for the morning papers, so drive ahead, my boy."

Fred took his place and began to tick at his neighbor's dictation

"By George!" said Mr. Chumleigh as he unfolded one of his many letters. "Here's Heatherton Hall on our hands again."

"No!" drawled the clerk at his side in surprise.

"Mr. Judson threw up the business two months ago; said he couldn't and wouldn't bother with such an old rat-trap. Why, it's in the depths of the Alleghanies, twenty miles from a railroad."

"The Alleghanies!" Fred pricked up his ears. The Alleghanies! and a vision of great wind-swept heights seemed to rise before his eyes, as he thought of the little blue-veined face lying in the close, hot sitting-room at home.

"This is a change of tune," said Mr. Chumleigh. "Colonel Heatherton writes from Paris that since the place cannot be rented, to put in a reliable caretaker and pay, if necessary, twenty dollars a month; for there are family portraits and papers of value. I wouldn't take the job for fifty."

"Gee, I would!" blurted out Fred excitedly.

"Would what?" asked Mr. Chumleigh, staring.

"Take the job—take care of Heatherton Hall."

"You!" exclaimed his neighbor. "Look here, you haven't been getting sunstruck too, Freddy, have you?"

"No," answered Fred, "nor moonstruck either. But I've got a little brother at home who is pretty sick, and the doctor says he must have mountain air; and—and—well, father isn't a rich man, you know, and can't give it to him. But if it's twenty dollars to take care of the house—"

"It's just that," said Mr. Chumleigh. "I only wish it were forty. Lay the advertisement over and see your father about it, my boy, and if you want Heatherton Hall to-morrow, it's yours. Half the roof is off, I believe, and half the chimney's down. Ghosts, wildcats, and moonshiners form the mountain society, and it's twenty miles from a railroad. But if you want 'mountain air' you'll get the genuine, unadulterated, double-X article, as freely as if you paid five dollars a day at a fashionable hotel for it."

"Does it cost much to get up there?" asked Fred.

"Well, I don't know," answered Chum-

leigh hesitatingly. "Britton, you were up around there hunting last fall; what's the fare up to Roxton?"

"Pretty steep, but we took our tent and traps, you know, and went by the canal-boat. It wasn't half bad, and they'd lump a whole family for one railroad fare. If you are thinking of emigrating, Freddy, try it. You can get a wagon at Roxton to go up the mountain. Load up with a few groceries; you'll need nothing else. It's a wilderness flowing with milk and honey."

And as Fred listened with wide-open ears to this friendly counsel, he thought of Tess kneeling in the little convent chapel, and felt, with a queer thrill in his heart, that St. Joseph had indeed "shown the way." And a very pleasant way it proved: for Captain Tom Trent, who owned half a dozen canal-boats, was an old friend of Mr. Lindsay, and it happened that one of the biggest and cleanest of his clumsy-looking fleet was just going to Roxton to load up with grain; and as jolly Captain Tom declared, "he'd just as lief have babies for ballast as anything else."

So it came to pass that six days after Doctor Doane had given his prescription, a big

wagon slowly creaked up the mountain side. Higher and higher and higher, until the tree-tops were waving below, and the river could be seen winding through the valley like a thread of silver; and the trains puffing over the trestles, twenty miles away, seemed swinging in spider-webs over the rocky gorges below; and still the wagon journeyed upward with Mam' Patsy's boy, Black Ben, on the driver's seat and Fred beside him, Rogue Robin held firmly between his knees, and Tess and Lou and mamma and Mam' Patsy behind; while Dickie-bird, nestling in shawls and rugs and robes and cushions, laughed aloud in glee as the breeze tossed his golden curls.

Mr. Lindsay was obliged to remain at his business, so Fred commanded the little party that was storming the heights in Love's name.

"There it is, at last," said Fred, pointing to a great pine-shaded house rising grim and gray against the setting sun.

"Oh, isn't it big!" exclaimed Tess breathlessly.

"And isn't it awfully lonesome!" cried Lou.

"The front steps are gone," chirped Rogue Robin delightedly.

"And de kitchen chimbly tumbled down," gasped Mam' Patsy. "De Lor' ! Miss Nell, what you and all dese chilluns gwine to do in an old roost like dis ?"

"Live and love," answered mamma as she caught Dickie-bird in her arms and saw the faint color the breeze had already kissed into his cheeks.

"Live and love, Mam' Patsy, live and love !"

CHAPTER II.

HEATHERTON HALL.

A QUEER old "roost" indeed it was. There was a great hall that seemed almost wide enough to turn a stage-coach in, and a broad, winding stair, down which six small boys could tumble abreast; and more rooms than one could count; at least Tess and Lou thought so, for just as they had settled the number satisfactorily, they would discover a dark door, or a zigzag staircase, leading to two or three more. Such queer low-pitched rooms, with little diamond-paned windows peeping out through hoods of ivy, and great black-throated chimneys filled with nesting swallows; and odd-looking furniture, that Mam' Patsy declared must have "growed" there, for "moving" it was beyond mortal strength; and long mirrors that made Tess's heart jump half a dozen times, before she realized that the tall, fair-haired

girl walking out of the corner to meet her was her own pretty self.

True, the porch steps were down and the kitchen "chimbly" and most of the kitchen roof; but the main house stood staunch and firm as an old fortress; and when Black Ben had made a cooking department in a big storeroom, and the dust was blown from the furniture, and the sunlight lit on the diamond-paned windows, and little voices were chirping on the staircase, and little feet pattering through the hall, the old "roost" was a "nest" again, full of warm young life and love.

Then there was a delightful old wilderness of a garden that must once have been a very aristocratic affair indeed; for it went tip-toeing down the mountain-side in a succession of stone terraces, with late berries ripening on the hedges, and peach and plum trees trained against the south walls, while a noisy little brook that had once filled the fountain leaped away in a foaming waterfall as if laughing "You'll never catch me again" to the poor little broken-nosed Cupid who stood ruefully watching his empty urn.

Mam' Patsy did the marketing at the back

door, where grave-faced women in "slab" sunbonnets, and bare-legged, solemn-eyed children, brought milk, butter, eggs, chickens, honey, and vegetables every day.

"A chicken for a dime, Mam' Patsy!" exclaimed Mrs. Lindsay, as she was conferring with her faithful factotum. "You must be mistaken."

"De Lor', Miss Nell, dey'd gib 'em fur a nickel ef I jewed 'em down," chuckled Mam' Patsy. "What 'count's chickens up hyah? What good is dimes up hyah? Got no churches or s'cieties or nuffin. Nebber hab eben camp-meetings," said Mam' Patsy scornfully.

"Cal Jones don't know who Our Lord is," piped Rogue Robin, who was perched on the window-sill, nibbling a corncake.

"Oh, Robbie!" said his shocked mother.

"He don't," repeated Robbie. "He said I was talking about the man that kept the store at Mill Creek."

"I dun tell you 'bout dese hyah po' white trash," said Mam' Patsy. "Jes' nachally don't know nuffin. Didn't dat ar pumpkin-face gal, Maria Jane, dat come up hyah 'lowing she knowed how to wash, raw-starch all my

sheets and pillow-cases till day could 'most stan' alone ? ”

“ And she chewed tobacco,” chirped Rogue Robin delightedly. “ She gave me a piece to try.”

“ Jes' let me ketch you a-trying it,” said Mam' Patsy, turning fiercely on her pet nursling, who being at once the pride and torment of her life came in for an extra share of attention. “ Let me ketch you at any of dat foolishness and I'll lay you'll find a switch roastin' for you in dis fire dat will make you sing. De Lord knows what we'se a-gwine to do wif dat boy, Miss Nell,” continued Mam' Patsy, as Rogue Robin made a somersault out of the window and bounded away. “ He's gwine to learn all sorts ob debbilment in dis hyah place.”

“ We must watch him,” said Mrs. Lindsay, anxiously feeling that “ Skyland ” had its disadvantages. “ He's too young to go round here alone.”

“ Watch him ! ” repeated Mam' Patsy grimly. “ Don't do to stop at watching Rogue Robin ! Didn't I hab him tied to de table-leg all yester mawning and de minnit my back was turned de little rascal cut de

rope wif de knife I left on de table, and clipped de Lord knows whar. Ain't Black Ben a-telling him all de time 'bout de wolves and bears dat's waiting up in de woods to eat him? Lor'," chuckled Mam' Patsy, "you can't skeer dat boy nohow, you nebber could; he jest nachally out breaking."

"He must be kept at home, around the garden at least," said Mrs. Lindsay resolutely; and for a day or two the Rogue, held sternly within bounds, was a very household angel; then he disappeared again, to be brought home perched on Cal Jones's sturdy shoulder—a forlorn little figure dripping to the skin.

"Pulled him outen the river," explained the young mountain giant briefly.

"Just went a-fishing, mamma," said the small prodigal, mournfully displaying a spool of thread and a bent pin; "'cause to-morrow is Friday, and I caught 'em, too," said Robbie triumphantly. "Caught 'em in my hand," and diving into his wet pocket he brought out two tadpoles. "Ain't they nice, mamma? Dickie can have 'em for tea."

A faint smile flickered over Cal's face, that usually looked as if carved of wood, so changeless was every feature. They were not

bad features either; but with hair, skin, and clothes bleached and tanned to the same hue, Cal, for all the life or soul in his face, might have been "blocked out" of a mountain oak.

"I don't know how to thank you," said Mrs. Lindsay, turning towards him, when with dire threats of vengeance Mam' Patsy bore her nursling away to be rubbed and cuddled and warmed. "And you are all wet yourself! Let me get you some dry clothes."

"What fur?" asked Cal, whose words were usually slow and few. "I ain't hurting, but that young un"—Cal paused, and gave a hitch to his one clay-colored suspender—"taint ez safe ez it might be to let him go—fishing—alone."

"He ought to be thrashed soundly for it," said Fred, who had come in just after a bad half-hour's search for his small brother.

"Ef I hadn't been around," continued Cal, making another effort at friendly warning, "he—he wouldn't have got outen the river very easy. It's six foot deep where he tumbled in."

An icy thrill went through the mother's heart. "You saved his life," she said tremulously. "Oh, what can I do for you?"

"Twan't nothing," said Cal, "only you bean't a-going to thrash him, be you?"

"Oh, no, no!" answered Mrs. Lindsay.

"I thought mebbe you mout," said Cal, in a relieved tone. "And he is so little and so pretty and peart, I wouldn't like to hev him hurt."

"You need not fear," said Robbie's mother, smiling at the rude tenderness of the appeal. "And if you won't change your clothes you must sit down by the fire and get dry, while I make you a nice cup of hot coffee. I cannot let Robbie's kind friend catch cold."

Nothing loath, Cal took the chair given to him, and stared around him in evident admiration.

The improvised "kitchen" was rather a cheery place with its big hearth full of blazing logs, Mam' Patsy's pots and pans shining in the firelight, great loaves of bread baking in the Dutch oven, Lou and Tess slicing ham and gingerbread for lunch.

"You uns got it right nice up here," he said slowly to Fred.

"Well, tolerable," said the young head of the house, who was swinging his legs from the kitchen table. "If there is a way of

getting things right mother generally can find it."

Cal nodded as he watched the busy little figure moving to and fro.

"And you uns ain't skeered no ways to stay up here?" he asked, with an odd look.

"Scared! of what?" questioned Fred in return.

Cal's face suddenly became lifeless again. "Dunno, 'less it's the ha'nts."

"Ghosts, you mean?" said Fred laughing.

"There, Tess, what did I tell you?" said Lou excitedly. "There's something awfully creepy about this house, I know. I felt it from the first. The place is haunted, you say?" she continued, turning to Cal. "Oh, do tell us all about it!"

But "telling" was not in Cal's line. He shuffled uneasily under the eager gaze of Lou's bright eyes. "Dunno," he repeated. "I heern say the old Heathertons walk—I never seen 'em."

"Oh, but you've heard about them," said Lou. "There's some dreadful secret about the place, I'm sure."

"Dozens of 'em," grimly assented Fred, with a boy's delight in feminine fears.

"The house is old enough, goodness knows, to have a family skeleton in every closet. And I guess the old Heathertons were a pretty hard lot, weren't they?"

Again the curious glint came into Cal's dull eyes. "You ain't a-knowing of 'em?" he asked. "You ain't enny sort of kin?"

"No, don't know anything about them, except that there is a Colonel Heatherton in Paris who let us have the house."

"That's young Jim," said Cal, with a nod. "There war two on 'em, young Jim and young Joe; and old Jim, the Jedge, was their dad. An' they had a split 'way back in war-times, and old Jim he kicked out young Joe neck and heels, fur wanting to jine the Rebs. And he never come back."

"Killed?" asked Fred eagerly.

"Dunno," answered Cal stolidly. "Thar's folks ez says he wuz, and thar's folks ez says he wuzn't. An' thar's folks ez says after the old Jedge cut him outen everything, his mind turned an' he died a-calling young Joe back. An' thar's folks ez says he will never rest till he comes."

"So it is the old Judge who 'walks,'" said Fred dryly. "I am glad you told us, Cal; it

will be pleasanter, in case he visits us, to know his name and address."

"An' thar's folks ez says," continued Cal, as if he had been a wooden clock wound up for a certain time and had not quite run down, "that thar's been a cuss on Heatherton ever since it's been in young Jim's hands. Dad says thar's allus a cuss when ha'nts walk. The old place won't sell, and won't rent, and won't do nuthing but stan' here and dry-rot."

"Can't we lay the Judge, somehow?" asked Fred, whose eyes were twinkling with fun at Cal's solemn narration. "Pity to have a fine piece of property like this spoiled by such an unpleasant tenant. Keep your eyes open for a night or two, girls, and if you see any shadowy old gentleman patrolling the premises, inform him there is a live real-estate man on the spot ready to negotiate a quit claim at two per cent."

"Fred, Fred," interrupted his mother, in gentle reproof. "Death and the mystery beyond are no subjects for jest, my son."

"And it's awful to think of living in a house with a curse on it," said Lou, who had never found Heatherton Hall altogether to her taste.

"Let us change the curse into a blessing, dear," said Mrs. Lindsay smiling, as she poured out Cal's coffee.

"Sin and sorrow, no doubt, have darkened this old home in the past; but no curse can touch God's children, Lou."

"And then we have brought our good angels with us," added Tess softly. "They will keep us from all harm."

"And I have father's bulldog pistol loaded to the nozzle," said practical Fred, who had heard that there were fiercer spirits than the old Judge still embodied in these mountains; "and I will make it bark, I tell you, at any ha'n't that comes fooling 'round here." And as Cal drank his coffee he looked from one bright face to the other in dull wonder at the light and love and gladness that he had never known.

"Dad," he said, that evening, when he sat smoking his clay pipe at his father's side, by the door of their old mountain cabin, "what's angels?"

"Angels!" said Cal senior, who was of a little heavier block than his son.

"Angels," he repeated, recalling certain "pictooors" sold by a peripatetic peddler.

"All I knows of 'em is they wuz critters mostly head and wings."

"They've got them up to Heatherton," said Cal.

"They hev!" said his father, taking out his pipe. "Did yer see 'em?"

"No," answered Cal. "But the girl said she had brought 'em with her, and I guess she hez."

"Jest you keep away, then," said dad fiercely. "Don't you go fooling 'roun' critters like that; d' ye hear me? yer can't tell what they'll do to ye. Angels! I wonder what these here city gals 'll kerry 'roun' with 'em next?"

"She mout have 'em caged," suggested Cal thoughtfully.

"She mout," said dad, nodding, "and then agin she moutn't. Jest you mind what I say and don't yer meddle, that's all."

And then father and son smoked on in silence while the darkness fell softly around them, and the night breeze murmured in the treetops and the great mountain rose solemn and mist-veiled under the archway of the stars.

CHAPTER III.

JACK-O'-LANTERN.

"SUTHING's got to be done," said Mam' Patsy, as she surveyed her pet nursling swaddled in flannel and turpentine on the sitting-room sofa. "Suthing's got to be done 'bout that boy before he kills hisself fur good and all." For immersion in an ice-cold mountain stream had proved too much for the sturdy little fisherman, and Rogue Robin was recovering from a three days' attack of croup. Illness always reduced him to mournful submission, and it seemed a captive angel that lay in the sitting-room, where a log fire blazed on the hearth, and mamma dosed, and Mam' Patsy watched, and the little prodigal with fever-flushed cheeks and starry eyes was an object of anxious interest to all.

"Don't you skeer about dat boy, chile," said Mam' Patsy reassuringly to tearful Tess. "He gwine to lib to eat de sheep dat grazes

on your grave, and mine too. De Lord nebber takes out breaking chillun like dat. I knows Rogue Robin. He's lying dar steddying up some new mischief now."

"Mam'," said Rogue Robin, when they were alone after one of these periods of suspicious quiet, "did Cal Jones get the croup too?"

"S'pect he got wuss than croup," answered Mam' Patsy grimly; "ain't seen him sence he fotched you home. You orter to bress de Lord you didn't get wuss too. I tell you 'bout fooling 'roun' dis hyah place, you dunno what's a-gwine to ketch you. Didn't Miss Tess read you outen dat pictoor-book tu-day 'bout de boy dat climbed up er bean-stalk to skyland, and come near being biled for dinner when he got dar? An' you's a heap higher up hyah dan any bean-stalk could fotch you, I kin tell you dat."

"Do you think there are any giants up here?" asked Robbie breathlessly.

"Dat dere is," said Mam' Patsy, whose knowledge of giants was necessarily very limited, but who caught an encouraging tremor in Robbie's voice, "and de berry wust kind too."

"Has—has anybody ever seen one, Mam'?" asked her patient skeptically.

"'Deed dey has," replied Mam' Patsy, with a nod, "and skeered enough dey is of him, too. I hears de folks talking when dey comes to de back door wif dere butter and eggs and garden sass. Dey ain't letting dere boys go skooting roun' dese skylands all 'lone. I hears what dey talking 'bout under dem slab sunbonnets," added Mam' Patsy, with dark significance.

"What do they say, Mam'?" asked Robbie, who had risen from his sofa-cushions in awe-struck interest.

"All 'bout dis hyah Jack-o'-Lantern," continued Mam' Patsy, getting her story-book names slightly mixed.

"Is that the giant's name?" asked Robbie, with wide-open eyes.

"Dat's his name, chile," went on Mam' Patsy, feeling she had gone too far to retreat now, "and a monstrous bad name it is. Dey calls him Jack-o'-Lantern long ob de light he kerries 'roun' ob nights a-hunting fur stray chillun. I'se seen it a-glimmering up on de rocks many a time from dat garret window ob mine. Not dat he don't hunt in de daytime,

too," added Mam' Patsy hastily, "but he hides hisself den in de bushes wif a big bag in his hand and waits for 'em to come."

"And has he a castle and a harp, and a hen that lays golden eggs, like the story-book says?" asked Robbie, who had never lost his infantile faith in "Mammy's" knowledge and wisdom.

"Got 'em all," answered Mam' Patsy, feeling it unwise to depart too far from story-book lines. "Got ebberyting—hens and geese and sheep and hogs and—ebberyting. But he got dat mean, res'less sort ob mind, he ain't satisfied nohow. Jes' keeps a-hongering and a-hunting fur a boy to bile in his big soup-pot, like de book Miss Tess was a-reading to you says. He's a turrible fellow, dis Jack-o'-Lantern, I kin tell you dat. Skeered him dis time," chuckled Mam' Patsy to herself as she saw the look in Robbie's face. "Skeered 'him dis time—shuah."

And her success was even greater than she dreamed, for twice that night the family were roused by the fevered boy's shrieks, and Rogue Robin was found wide-eyed and trembling in fear of Jack-o'-Lantern and his bag.

"Don't you tell him no better, Miss Nell,"

warned Mam' Patsy. "Heap better hev him skeered dan drowned."

And Robbie's mother, with the thought of crag and creek before her, reluctantly acceded to this nursery diplomacy, and the mythical "Jack-o'-Lantern" henceforth became Mam' Patsy's unfailing ally with her restless little charge.

Jack roamed the heights and kept stealthy watch by the creeks; his lantern glimmered down the mountain gorges, his pot "biled" amid the "onsatisfying" treasures of his airy castle.

Black Ben, whose bears and wolves had proved such inadequate terrors, took up the new theme with great gusto and enlarged upon "Jack" with all the young Negro's delight in the terrible and the unknown. Even Fred, when things were a little "slow" found it great fun to carry on the joke, and watch Rogue Robin's brown eyes widen at the exploits of the renowned Jack, who was credited with all the deeds of classical and mythological heroes. Golden apples grew on Jack's trees, and there was a wonderful spring at his door that kept him always strong and well and young.

"Won't he ever get sick or die?" asked Robbie, with a vague hope that a constant diet of "small boy" would prove too much for Jack's digestion.

"Never; at least not while that spring lasts," answered Fred decidedly. "He's about two or three hundred years old now and likely to live two or three hundred more."

Altogether the family coalition on Jack-o'-Lantern proved a strategic success, and Rogue Robin confined his wanderings to grove and garden, where he and Dickie swung in the pine-trees and scampered down the terraced walks, while the mountain breeze tossed their curls, and painted their cheeks, and made their pulses throb with strength and health and hardy young life again.

A rough, rollicking playmate indeed was this mountain breeze—snatching their hats and sending them flying into the treetops, whisking off Mam' Patsy's snowy "wash" from bleaching-ground and line, shouting hoarsely over the rocks, and whistling down the chimneys, and teasing the little brook until, in a flurry of wrath, it fairly boiled down the hill. Many were the moods and antics of the mountain breeze. Sometimes it

sang such sweet lullabies in the grove that Dickie nodded off in the midst of his play, and mamma would find him fast asleep on the pine-needles, with the breeze softly fanning his brow. Sometimes it would sulk far up on the heights in the noontide stillness, and then would burst forth in fierce fury, terrible to hear and see. For the trees would bend and shiver, and windows shake, and doors rattle, and a thunder of falling rocks and rending boughs would echo through the woods, while the poor little brook would leap away in a very foam of fright. And then like a naughty child the breeze would begin to sob penitently, and the sun would break out through the black, frowning storm-clouds, and a rainbow span the mountain, and Dickie, running out to see it, would find his playmate merrily shaking the rain-drops from the pines as if nothing at all unpleasant had occurred.

Then, too, besides the breeze, there was the mountain mist with its vagaries. At first it was rather a startling experience to awake in the morning and find the world had altogether disappeared and Heatherton Hall was apparently adrift in the clouds without pilot

or rudder. But after one or two alarms the children got used to the tricks of the mist. Tess in particular loved to stand at her high dormer-window and watch the white cloud-sea shimmer into pink and gold, while peak and treetop and rock gradually rose out of its depths, until, as if it had snatched a veil from its face, the mountain was laughing in the glory of the sunrise.

"It's lovely to see so far, isn't it?" said Tess one morning, as she looked across miles and miles of waving greenery and saw the white thread of smoke left by the far-off train sweeping on its dizzy way.

"I don't know," answered Lou. "I think I'd rather see just across the street. Of course we had to come here for Dickie's sake, and it has done him lots of good, but I'm dead homesick sometimes, Tess."

"Homesick!" echoed Tess wonderingly. "Why, isn't this home now, Lou?"

"No, it isn't," answered Lou decidedly. "Thank Heaven, too, for I don't want any such great barn with a dead Judge walking around it for my home. And the girls are having such lovely times in town. Cal Jones brought me a long letter from Gracie Dorr

last night. It had been a week at Rorston. Nobody knew who we were or what we were, until Cal went down and Fred told him to ask at the post-office if there were any letters for Heatherton Hall. You know papa sends his to the other office, and they let a boy bring them up twice a week. But Gracie did not know that."

"And, oh, what did the letter say, Lou?" asked Tess eagerly.

"Oh! lots of things," sighed Lou. "Father John has had a festival, and all the girls went and wore their commencement dresses, and had the loveliest sort of time. And Janet is going to the seashore and has lots of new clothes and is awfully stuck up. And all our crowd met at Fan Wylie's the other night and made caramels. And Gracie's Aunt Mollie has gone to the convent."

"Oh, has she?" interrupted Tess. "The pretty one with golden hair, that was so full of fun?"

"Yes, that's the kind that always goes," said Lou. "I never saw a long-faced nun, did you? If you keep on chirping about everything as you do now, you'll land in a convent yourself, miss, see if you don't," con-

cluded Lou with a nod of solemn warning. "It doesn't stir your soul a bit to think of our white swiss dresses folded away up-stairs with never a chance to shake out a ruffle."

"No, it doesn't," said Tess, laughing.

"Nor of Fan Wylie's birthday party we are going to miss," continued Lou; "and Gracie says she is going to have the ice-cream in moulds, and a black waiter. And here we are with no stores, no company, no church—nothing. We might as well be in a heathen land at once."

"That is true," said Tess thoughtfully. "It seems as if we ought to do something, Lou. Be sort of missionaries, you know."

"Missionaries!" said Lou, staring.

"Don't you remember when Sister Angela read us about Father Brébœuf?"

"Ugh, yes!" said Lou, with a shiver. "Don't talk about it, Tess, it makes my flesh creep. Oh, I'd never make a martyr, I know. I'd break right down when it came to hot irons and knives."

"Well, you know Sister Angela said we would never be called upon to suffer things like that, but we all might be little missionaries in other ways. She said we had our

little brothers and sisters and servants to teach by word and example. And don't you remember, Lou, the copy she set on the blackboard that day: 'So let your light shine before men that, seeing it, they may glorify your Father who is in heaven'? And here we are at heaven's door almost," and Tess looked up to the arching skies, "and heathens around us who scarcely know God's holy name. Lou, it seems as if somehow we ought to make our light shine here."

"We might have a Sunday-school," suggested Lou, evidently impressed by her sister's sweet earnestness. "But I don't think any one up here knows when Sunday comes. If mamma did not gather us all for Mass-prayers I would forget, myself."

"We might call it singing-school," said Tessie; "you have such a lovely voice, Lou. I know these poor children never heard anything like it. And I am sure mamma would let me make some ginger cookies for them, and then we could tell stories in the garden afterwards—true stories, you know, about Our Lord and His Blessed Mother. I think if we make it very pleasant they will like to come."

"But how can we send word to them? We don't know their names," asked Lou, quite waking up to interest in Tess's plan.

"We know Cal Jones," answered Tess, "and there's little Nan Dobbins, that brings the milk every day, and that funny little Madge, that comes twice a week with butter and eggs. We could ask them and tell them to bring the rest. Oh, let us go ask mamma about it." And both girls tripped down to their mother to find the sweet sympathy they expected, leavened with a little smiling doubt to which she gave no words.

CHAPTER IV.

LIGHT AND SHADOW.

"THERE," said Tess as she filled up the sixth plate of cookies and set them on the side table, "I think that will be enough, Lou. We want half a dozen more chairs; bring them out of the dining-room, Fred, that's a dear boy, while I run up-stairs for the music-book. The old melodeon is a little squeaky, but mamma says if we play softly it will sound right well."

Very festal indeed looked the big parlor as it stood prepared for the "singing-school." The six windows were thrown open to the sunshine, the queer Chinese vases were filled with fresh flowers, the great chimney-place was made into a very Christmas bower with pine boughs, while the old Heatherton portraits blinked down wonderingly from the walls on the unaccustomed scene.

"When does this 'revival,' or whatever it may be termed, begin?" asked Fred, seating

himself astride a chair and helping himself liberally to cookies.

"Just as soon as the children come. And oh, Fred, don't make fun, please."

"Who is making fun?" asked Fred. "I am as solemn as the Judge himself. I tell you the old gentleman is around, girls. I heard him last night."

"Where?" gasped Lou excitedly.

"Now, Fred, you know you are talking nonsense," said wiser Tess reproachfully.

"I think he was in the library," continued Fred, his eyes twinkling. "There was the *tap, tap, tap* of a ghostly cane up and down the floor, as if the old gentleman were troubled in his mind and walking it off. Perhaps he has heard that the moonshiners are back on the Ridge."

"What are the moonshiners?" asked both girls eagerly.

"Moonshiners, my innocents," said Fred, who, as the eldest of the family, was thoroughly imbued with a sense of his own superior worldly knowledge—"moonshiners are gentlemen who do business by moonlight."

"What kind of business?" asked Lou with wide-open eyes.

"Various sorts," answered Fred evasively. "And as they have a preference for doing it in their own way and not according to Uncle Sam's laws, he is down on them—or rather up after them—whenever he hears they are at work. Colonel Heatherton, who was sheriff, routed them off the Ridge about six years ago. Old Squire White told me about it when I was over at his place yesterday. He says they had a big fight up on the rocks, and there were two men killed and about half a dozen captured. The Squire says they are back again, he understands, with a fierce old outlaw at their head, who swears he will hold that Ridge against Jim Heatherton until one or the other of them drops dead. Amiable sort of neighbors to have," added Fred grimly.

"Oh, let us go home right away!" said Lou, her face blanching. "I am afraid to stay here another night. The moonshiners may come after us."

"No danger," answered Fred coolly. "We have done nothing to them. They may have a grudge against the Colonel, but he is safe in Paris, and we are not going to trouble them, I am sure, if they moonshine the whole sum-

mer through. Besides, we've taken the place for three months and can't go back on our bargain. Look out, Tess; here comes your Sunday-school. I'm off!" and Fred made a handspring over the chairs to the nearest door. But it was only Cal, who, with his clay-colored locks soaped into submission and two suspenders on, stood staring doubtfully into the parlor.

"Come in, Cal," said Tess, fluttering forward to meet him, "I am so glad to see you. Where are the rest?"

"Wouldn't come," answered Cal briefly.

"What, none of them?" exclaimed Tess in dismay.

"Nary un," replied Cal, with a gloomy stare at the opposite wall.

"Did you ask them?" asked Lou.

"Yes," answered Cal, "I tole 'em, and I hed ter lick three of 'em fur saying I was lying, and the rest of 'em—their dads wouldn't let 'em come."

"But why not?" asked Tess in wonder.

"Dunno," answered Cal, not a vestige of expression in his face.

"There! what did I tell you, Tess?" said Lou with mingled triumph and indignation.

"After we nearly burned our skins off yesterday baking cakes for the little wretches ! It's the first and last time I'll ever bother either about their souls or bodies, I know."

And Lou flounced wrathfully to report the dead failure of the "mission" to mamma, leaving Tess standing ruefully by her one recruit—poor, dull, blank-faced Cal. But had not Sister Angela taught her of the Shepherd who went over rocks and wilds for *one* lost sheep ?

"I am glad you came, anyhow, Cal," she said brightly.

"Reckon my dad will thrash me fur it, too, but I don't keer," said Cal. "I come fur to sing. I *kin* sing first-rate."

Tess had to draw down the corners of her mouth to keep back the smile.

"That is good," she said. "What can you sing, Cal ?"

"'Mos' anything," he answered with the calm assurance of an operatic star, "leastways anything you kin strike up."

With her pretty lips still a-quiver with the laugh Cal must not see, Tess took her seat at the old melodeon.

She had not Lou's rich gift of song, only

a sweet little birdlike soprano, that was usually almost lost in her sister's fuller notes.

But Lou had abandoned the missionary field, so Tess must do her best alone.

Turning over the music to her favorite "Fading, still fading," she began her "little pipe," as Fred teasingly called it.

But scarcely had she finished the first verse, when a rich, deep tenor took up the strain. Was it Cal singing? Poor Cal with his clay-colored face and dull eyes and wooden features? Cal who was pouring forth that wordless melody, strong and sweet as an organ's swell? For a moment Tess was struck almost dumb with surprise, then she took breath again and sang as she had never sung before, for that deep voice seemed to upbear hers as the great ocean wave upbears its silvery crest.

"Fading, still fading,
The last beam is shining,
Ave Maria!
Day is declining;
Safety and innocence,
Fly with the light,
Temptation and danger
Walk forth in the night."

"Oh, Cal!" said Tess, whirling round

rapturously on the creaky music-stool, "you can sing indeed ! I don't think I ever heard such a beautiful voice. Where did you learn ? how did you learn to sing like that ?"

"Dunno," answered Cal; "jest allus could do it, somehow. That's a fine tune, too. Kin strike the tune all right, but ain't much on ketching words. What is them walked forth in the night ?"

"Temptation and danger," answered Tess, smiling.

"Wuz they girls or boys ?" asked Cal.

"Oh, neither," said Tess, laughing outright.

"Critters, then, maybe," said Cal slowly.

"Oh, no, no ! Did you never hear of temptation ? It means something or somebody that tries to make you do wrong."

"Moonshiners, mebbe," said Cal, with the odd gleam that sometimes flashed into his dull eyes. "Though if folks don't bother them, they won't bother folks. But they'se got a grudge 'gin Jim Heatherton—a grudge that's pisen-strong, I tell yer that. Thar's lots on 'em up yon"—Cal motioned towards the mountain-tops—"that's skeered to come nigh this 'ere house."

"Why?" asked Tess wonderingly.

"Dunno," answered Cal. "Feared the old 'fox,' uz they call Jim Heatherton, is laying wait for 'em agin, and you uns is jest here to hide his tracks."

"What foolish people," laughed Tess, "when Colonel Heatherton is in Paris, and we never saw him in our lives!"

"You needn't ter want to," said Cal. "Cos if he were to come 'round, folks up yon mout get ugly. Thar's old Meg Watkins, that hed her boys both killed last fight—she ain't fure-getting that; and Mick Fitch, wot is got two boys in jail now; and thar's lots more jest biling over with hate and grudge 'gin Jim Heatherton and swearing they'll git even with him yet."

"Oh, I don't like to hear about hates and grudges and fights," sighed Tess, feeling as if this missionary field were quite beyond her reach. "It is all so wicked. But I suppose the poor people never had any one to teach them better."

"Thar's a school down ter Roxton," said Cal. "Bud Watkins went thar two sessions. Old Meg she got so fierce after his dad was killed, that Bud cut off and went down ter Roxton

to work. And he got ter school 'twixt whiles, and larned lots—figoorin and reading, and I heern he did say he could write his name, but I reckon that was jest brag. But he larned so much, ennyhow, that he went off, and Meg didn't get no more good outen him. Dad says that's wot larning does—makes folks sassy and lazy and good fur nothing at all."

"And—and—do you mean that no one up here can read or write or do anything?" exclaimed Tess, almost dumb with pity and dismay. "Oh, Cal, this is dreadful! Wouldn't you like to learn? Won't you let me teach you, Cal?"

"Kin you?" he asked, staring at the pretty little speaker in wonder.

"Why, of course I can!" she answered gayly.

"Real, rig'lar schoolmarm teaching?" he asked again, in a tone of doubt.

"Regular schoolmarm," affirmed Tess, with a decided nod. "Just try me. Come to-morrow and we will begin."

"You bet I will!" said Cal, and the dull glow that kindled his face spoke louder than words of his delight at the chance. "I ain't

skerring, not if ole Meg screeches her spells after me every day. I'll come if dad thrashes me fur it."

And thereafter Cal did come "rig'lar." What social or domestic persecution it brought upon him he never told, though more than once a black eye or a bruised head showed that the path of knowledge had its perils for him.

Mrs. Lindsay, who could never forget the mother debt she owed the rough young mountaineer, made no objection to Tess's scholar, and every afternoon the two could be seen seated on the garden terrace, Cal plodding laboriously through the mysteries of Robbie's primer, under his young teacher's earnest guidance.

It was slow work. Cal, who knew the leaf of every mountain tree, the song of every mountain bird, found the queer signs that stand for human thought and human speech altogether bewildering, while Tess, who had read ever since she could remember, could not understand the blank stare with which her pupil, after all her efforts, confronted the printed page. "Ba, be, bi, bo, bu" were after a while triumphantly mastered; then

came abstrusities for which Tess was not prepared.

"Now, b-o-y. What does that spell, Cal?" asked the little teacher encouragingly.

"B-o, bo," answered Cal confidently, surveying the familiar combination.

"Oh, no, Cal. B-o-y?" asked Tess again.

"You've been a-telling me b-o were bo. I wuz saying it all last night so I wouldn't forget," said Cal, with a touch of reproach in his tone.

"But this is b-o-y," said Tess. "Put a y to it, Cal. Don't you see? just a y."

"B-o, bo," spelled Cal again. "Wy—bo—wy. It don't appear to hitch right."

And Tess would make another effort to explain the mysteries of pronunciation, and Cal would stare at him "b-o, bo," more hopelessly than before.

But if letters did not "hitch right," the little teacher's stories were complete successes. After the daily struggle with refractory sounds and syllables Cal would fling himself comfortably down upon the grassy terrace at Tess's feet, and then, while the birds sang overhead and the little stream rippled and foamed merrily beside them, lessons were

given that reached far deeper than the primer's.

For the first time Cal learned of Our Father in heaven, His care and His love; of the little Babe of Bethlehem; of the gentle Boy of Nazareth; the divine Master who walked the hills and waves of Galilee.

Tess had brought her hard-won Christian Doctrine prize with her—a beautiful Bible History profusely illustrated—and “pictours” that Cal could understand verified her words. And as the boy looked and listened, his dull eyes kindled and the heavy wooden features seemed to break into softer lines. The Light was dawning for Cal—slowly indeed, but surely—as the heavy August mist that veiled the mountain flushed faintly under Tess's window with the rosy glow of the unseen sun.

CHAPTER V.

A FRIENDLY GHOST.

THE mountain was in its midsummer bloom. Tangles of flowering vines hid the frown of the cliffs, the gray, jagged rocks were feathered with hardy blossoms, and high up in the trees the trumpet-flowers blazed in crimson and gold.

"Oh, I must have some of them!" said Lou, who was making an herbarium that had relieved the *ennui* of her mountain exile wonderfully. Gentle Sister Angela had suggested to her scattered pupils this method of improving their summer holiday. Each little classmate was to make a collection of the flowers, ferns, or seaweed within her reach, and the specimens were to be bound handsomely for exhibition in the convent museum.

"I must have a spray of those lovely trumpet-flowers before a wind scatters them," said the enthusiastic little botanist. "Come,

Rogue Robin, let us go up the mountain-path and get some of those pretty red flowers."

"You'd better not," said Rogue Robin, gravely shaking his curly head. "They are Jack-o'-Lantern's flowers. Mam' says so."

"Oh, pshaw! I am not afraid of Jack-o'-Lantern. Come on," answered Lou.

"Doesn't he catch girls?" asked Rogue.

"Never," replied his sister positively. "And he won't catch you either while I am with you. So come along, and climb the tree for me. I am afraid the flowers are too high for me to reach." And nothing loath, the small prodigal, who had grown rather weary of the narrow bounds enforced by the dreaded Jack, put his chubby hand in his sister's, and they began to ascend the mountain path.

"Wouldn't you be afraid if you saw Jack-o'-Lantern, Lou?" he asked, evidently pondering still on the perplexing question.

"Not a bit," was his sister's reply.

"What—what would you say to him?" continued the questioner breathlessly.

"I'd say, 'Good-evening, Mr. Jack. I've come to get some of your pretty flowers,'" answered Lou gayly.

There was another pause. Rogue Robin

seemed striving to reconcile this feminine recklessness with his previous estimate of his sister's character.

"You were awfully scared when that caterpillar got on your neck yesterday," he said.

"Ugh ! yes. I nearly fainted," acknowledged Lou.

"And you jump on the table and scream whenever a mouse runs out of his hole," continued Robbie.

"Of course I do. Who wouldn't ?" queried his sister.

"Jack-o'-Lantern is a heap worse than mice or caterpillars," said Rogue Robin. "Black Ben says so. Black Ben says if he were to see him he guessed he'd be so scared he would turn white."

"Then I'd keep out of his way as long as I could, for if I could not face him courageously I certainly should not want to die of plain fright."

And so encouraging was Lou's cheerfulness that Rogue Robin began to look about him less fearfully, and soon the charms of the mountain almost dispelled the terrors of the mysterious Jack. For not only were there flowers galore on every side, but the great knotted vines swinging from tree to tree were

already laden with purpling grapes, and mountain-plums were ripening in hidden hollows, while half-wreathed by a scarlet Virginia creeper was a great old hollow trunk filled to the very roots with golden honey-comb that the bees must have been storing there for years. And everywhere was the merry mountain breeze rustling the leaves, and swinging the vines, and swaying the blossoms, and whispering mischief in Rogue Robin's ear as it tossed his curls. "Higher," it seemed to coax—"higher, little playmate, higher! See how the sunlight dances on those far-off peaks; hear how the waterfall laughs as it leaps down the rocks! Much more can I show you up there—much more. Come and see, little playmate; come and see." And what Rogue Robin, who had been good for six long weeks, might have answered to that naughty truant-call we cannot say, if Lou had not been there to guard.

"Come, Robbie," she said at last; "see, the sun is near its setting. We must go home."

And taking his hand, she led him safe through the enchanted path again. But alas for Mam' Patsy's care! Jack-o'-Lantern had lost half his terrors for the little wanderer, and

Rogue Robin had heard the call of the mountain, that would echo henceforth in his thoughts and in his dreams day and night.

The dusk had already gathered under the pines when Lou and her little companion reached home. Rogue Robin bounded into the house to show Dickie his mountain treasures, while his sister seated herself on the garden terrace to arrange her wealth of flowers.

It was one of those beautiful vesper hours when the earth seems to swing close to heaven and catch something of its blessedness and peace. The west flamed with the gorgeous colors of some great cathedral window; faint mist floated like incense from the valley below, while the one pale star that trembled above the mountain seemed gleaming in the violet shadows like a sanctuary lamp. And as Lou, weary after her long ramble, sat with her hands folded over her flowers, a rich strain of music came through the open parlor window. Cal's lesson over, he and his little teacher were singing in the gathering twilight.

**" Ave Sanctissima !
We lift our souls to thee "**

rose in Tess's silvery soprano, while Cal's deep tenor chimed in wordless notes, and from her seat on the terrace Lou joined the refrain, till the whole garden was pulsing and thrilling with harmony that to an unseen watcher who stood listening near seemed a greeting from heaven itself.

The glow had faded from the west when the hymn was finished, and with her arms full of flowers Lou rose to return to the house, when her heart gave a wild leap and then seemed to stand still.

For there close beside her, under the one great oak that the storms had left on the terrace, stood a tall shadowy figure with the pale, grave face, the deep-set eyes of the full-length portrait that hung in the great hall.

With a wild shriek of terror she sprang past the ghostly visitant to the house. "The Judge!" she gasped, bursting into the family group assembled in the sitting-room. "Oh, the Judge! the Judge! Mamma, I have seen him—I have seen him!"

"My dear, my dear, what nonsense!" said Mrs. Lindsay soothingly, as she took the trembling girl in her arms. "It was only a fancy, a twilight shadow."

"Oh, no, no, no!" sobbed Lou. "I saw him as plainly as I see you."

"Where? when?" cried the other children in excited chorus.

"Oh, there, there!" shrieked Lou again, pointing to the shadowy figure in the open doorway.

"My dear child," said a deep voice that somehow calmed the tumult, it was so human and so kind, "I am truly sorry to have frightened you. Pardon my intrusion, madam, but I saw your little girl's terror, and felt I must follow her and explain my presence. I was passing the road below, and stopped to look at this old house, which I believed to be unoccupied, when your beautiful vesper hymn held me spellbound. My dear children, I am no very terrible ogre, only an old missionary priest—Father Xavier, who would bless instead of harm you."

"A priest!" exclaimed Mrs. Lindsay. "Then indeed you are a welcome visitor, father. You must forgive these young people of mine their foolish fears, but they have heard so much of the ghosts that haunt Heatherton Hall that they have grown a little fanciful and nervous."

"Shake hands, then, and be sure that I am solid flesh and blood," said Father Xavier as he extended his hand first to one and then to another of the family group.

"Ah, my children, you need not fear the dead. They are in God's keeping and subject in all things to His holy will. Though, as we older people know, dear madam, all of us are ghosts in a way—the ghosts of our dead selves. I feel very much like such a ghost to-night. Is it possible that I find Catholics in possession of Heatherton Hall?"

"Only temporarily, father," answered Mrs. Lindsay. "We are spending the summer here for the benefit of our little one's health. And we must claim you as our guest for to-night, at least, for it is late and you must be far from home."

"Home?" echoed Father Xavier, with a sad smile. "That word has no earthly meaning for the missionary, my child. But if you will kindly give me and my good horse, who stands in the road without, shelter for the night I will be grateful, as I am fully twenty miles from my headquarters—Father Stone's, at Pinesville. I returned about a month ago, after long years of service abroad, and was

ordered up into the mountains to recuperate. Meanwhile, by my superior's permission, I am doing a little missionary work in out-of-the-way corners, just to keep my hand in," said Father Xavier, with his grave, kind smile. "I scarcely expected that work would lead me into such pleasant company as this," he added, as he took his seat in the big armchair which Fred rolled out for him, while Black Ben went out at Mrs. Lindsay's bidding to get his horse, and the children gathered around, shy yet delighted at the unwonted presence among them.

"Goodness knows we need a missionary up here," said Tess, whose one mountain sheep had taken rapid flight at sight of the new-comer.

"Tess has been trying it, and speaks from sad experience," said Fred teasingly. "How many pounds of ginger-cakes does it take to catch one mountaineer, Tess? She has got the thing down to a fraction, father; ask her about it."

"Ah, but I am only a girl," said Tess, blushing, but untroubled by her brother's chaffing, "and girls cannot do much."

"Only a girl!" echoed Father Xavier.

"But so was the little maid Jeanne who led the armies of France, my child. So was the little Bernadette, whose voice gave the world Lourdes with all its holy beauties and wonders. So were Agnes and Cecilia and Agatha and thousands of others whose names the Church honors. And so was She, the purest, the holiest of all, whose praises I heard you singing to-night. Only a girl! Ah, my child, girls have done much in this world of ours. If they knew the power of their gentleness they could do more, far more."

"Not up here, father," said Fred, the incorrigible; "Tess did all she could. Half a peck of ginger-cakes and a cracked melodeon were held forth as attractions, but the heathen of these mountains look darkly upon us, and evidently suspected a trap."

"And yet I understand that some of the lawless characters up in the heights are by birth and doubtless baptism Catholics," said Father Xavier. "It was this information that led me through this part of the mountain region on a tour of investigation. I thought if we could establish a station somewhere in the locality these outlaws might be attracted, and perhaps some spark of faith

lingering in their souls kindled into life again. But so far I must say my inquiries have resulted in nothing but discouragement. No one seems to know what Catholic means. I am met by a blank stare of either bewilderment or fear."

"We know that 'blank stare,'" laughed Fred. "It's the local expression, father. There's more behind it than you think. These fellows stare at you like a tailor's dummy, with the Old Nick at work in their hearts. Oh, they're a fine set of rascals up on the Ridge! You might as well try to Christianize cannibals."

"I have tried that, too," said Father Xavier, smiling, "and with some success, my boy, though several times I came very near winning the martyr's crown. But I was not to be so blessed; each time some of my faithful natives crept up in the darkness and broke my thongs, and as my life was not my own, but my Master's, I had to value it in His name."

"Oh, father, tell us all about it!" pleaded an eager chorus; and then, as Black Ben piled the logs on the hearth and struck them into the blaze the chilling evenings now de-

manded, the children gathered around Father Xavier's chair and listened with breathless interest to his stories of life in those far-off Pacific isles where for twenty years his lot had been cast. Stories as wonderful and beautiful as any they had ever read in books: of wanderings in strange tropical forests, and hair-breadth escapes from savage captors; daring journeys through hostile lands; hiding amid rocks and swamps; Masses said in ocean caverns, and sweet miracles of grace wrought in breasts that seemed scarcely human in their ferocity, until God touched them, and these barbarians became submissive as little children to His word and will.

And when Father Xavier told of the first-communion day of his dark-skinned flock, when the little bark chapel was carpeted with woven blossoms, and the two rival chiefs whose fierce warfare had decimated the little island knelt hand in hand and vowed peace and good-will before their new-found God, Tess could restrain her enthusiasm no longer.

"Oh, father," she said with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, "why couldn't we do something like that up here? We could have

Mass right in this house. It would be so lovely; and even if no one else came—”

“Our Lord would find one loving little heart, I am sure,” concluded Father Xavier, his eyes resting on the pretty, eager face. “If your good mother wishes it, I do not know anything that would give me greater happiness than to say **Mass** in this house.”

“We would all be delighted, father,” said Mrs. Lindsay, “but I fear it would be impossible to obtain what is necessary in a wilderness like this.”

“Leave that to an old missionary,” said Father Xavier, smiling. “I will make all arrangements; and if we cannot bring the sheep from the wilderness, at least there will be the ‘ninety-nine in the fold.’”

And so it was settled. And when, his pleasant visit over, Father Xavier bade them good-by next morning, he told them to expect him back in a week or ten days at most.

“Pretty clever sort of ghost that you raised last night, Lou,” said Fred as they all stood on the broken porch and watched their guest ride away through the pines. “Though, by George! when you look at him hard there is a likeness to the family spook. When he stood

under the portrait in the hall this morning giving us his blessing, you could almost have fancied the old Judge had put on a Roman collar and stepped down from his frame."

"I don't see a bit of likeness," said Tess indignantly. "Father Xavier looks like a saint." And every one agreed with her.

CHAPTER VI.

A TRIP TO ROXTON.

"Off for Roxton!" shouted Fred through the broad hall. "Mother, Tess, Lou, any more orders? Speak now, or for the next two weeks hold your peace."

For Squire White's big wagon, that twice a month lumbered across the mountain side, and with rustic courtesy rolled three miles out of its way to pass Heatherton Hall, was at the gate with Lem White in the driver's seat; while wicker crates of quacking and clucking poultry, kegs of butter, jars of honey, barrels of early apples, boxes of peaches and melons were heaped promiscuously behind him. The White farm was far down the west mountain side, its fertile fields stretching low into the river valley; but the Squire's boats came to Roxton wharves, and the Roxton store was the trading-place of all

the mountains, hence the semi-monthly connections between farm and town. A fat, ruddy, jolly old farmer was Squire White, whose keen, twinkling eyes, it was whispered, had blinked good-humoredly at many things it behooves a justice of the peace to investigate. But "taming the mountain" the Squire felt, required a stronger hand than his, so he made the best of things, and let his wild neighbors "gang their ain gait" untroubled.

Two of his boys were making their own way in the world; the third, Lem, a hardy, long-limbed fellow of sixteen, was still at home, his father's right-hand man in everything.

Fred, who had found weeks of fishing and lounging about Heatherton rather tiresome, had struck up a long-distance friendship with Lem; and despite the five miles between the places tramped frequently down to White's, where Lem, though too busy about farm and stables to be much of a boon companion, always welcomed the bright city youth cordially.

The fortnightly trip to Roxton was therefore a gala day to both; for Lem, attired in store clothes, with a trusted son's control over

the day's sales and purchases, was a very important person indeed.

"Last call!" shouted Fred. "Any more orders?"

"Don't forget my embroidery cotton, Fred, please," called Tess anxiously, "and three papers of needles."

"And my letter-paper, lavender color, if you can, Fred, just like Gracie's, you know."

"Monogram and crest for twenty-five cents a box," said Fred grimly. "All right, if it can be found in Roxton; though my remembrance of the stationery is a pile of fly-specked commercial cap and six packages of yellow envelopes; anything else?"

"I gave you my ten cents for a ball; don't you forget it," called Rogue Robin from the head of the steps.

"And mamma says bring me a balloon, Fred," piped Dickie.

"And you've got the grocery order, dear, and Robbie's shoe, and the sample of flannel," said his mother.

"Yes, yes," laughed Fred, feeling there were disadvantages in being head of the family. "It's more than one brain will carry, but I've got a memorandum, so good-by,

mother dear, and don't worry if I am a little late, for Lem says we may have to wait for the Squire's boat to come in, with his new cutting machine."

And kissing his mother and sisters, Fred sprang to the seat beside Lem, and the big wagon lumbered slowly away.

The summer was nearly gone; already there was a chilly touch in the evening air that made great log fires snapping on the hearth pleasant to look upon; the trees had begun to trick themselves out in autumn finery of crimson and gold; while high upon the rock the sumach flaunted its red leaves and berries like a conquering flag.

"It's my last trip, I guess, with you, Lem, old fellow," said Fred. "We leave the first of September."

"Sorry to hear it," answered Lem. "I'll miss you lots. But I reckon you'll be glad enough to get back to town. It's slow up here for you."

"Well, yes," answered Fred frankly. "Still I've had a first-rate time in a quiet way."

"We ain't so quiet up here always," said Lem, flecking his horses into a trot as they

reached a level stretch, "you've been in luck. Father says you could have knocked him down with a feather when he heard you all were at Heatherton Hall. He said there was no use in making you feel uncomfortable, so we didn't say anything about it, but now that all has been quiet and you are going away so soon, I don't mind telling you that there's not a family within fifty miles would have been paid to stay there a week. It's a bad thing to be in with the Heathertons, anyway, up here. The folks up on the Ridge are dead set against them; and to say nothing of the men, who are bad enough, that old hag, Meg Watkins, has sworn vengeance on all the Heatherton kith and kin, and would as lief put a match to the house as not. And they are all so stupid they can't understand you folks coming up to a battered old place like this, unless Squire Heatherton had something to do with it. You've taken big risks without knowing it," continued Lem, "but luckily it has turned out all right. Mother says babies always bring luck, so perhaps your little kids kept the boys quiet. There will be trouble before long, I am afraid, for I heard a lot of smuggled liquor had been captured down the

canal, and the officers are on its track. But you will be off before the row comes."

"Yes," said Fred, a trifle regretfully. "Though if it were not for mother and the rest of them, I'd like to be here when the row comes and see the fun."

"Fun!" echoed Lem grimly. "If that's the sort of fun you like, just try climbing up those rocks after nightfall," and he nodded towards the fir-clad peaks around which the road curved. "You would find all the fun you wanted. They are guarded like a fortress after sundown."

"Is that so?" asked Fred. "Gee! I'd like to try it, but father's orders were not to leave mother and the girls unprotected after dark, so I've kept to the house."

"It was well you did," said level-headed Lem. "The boys on the Ridge are not to be fooled with, I tell you, especially by any one hailing from Heatherton Hall. If my father did not keep his eyes and mouth wisely shut we would not have a barn or a hayrick standing. As it is, we mind our own business and let the folks on the Ridge mind theirs." And then, as the big horses cautiously made their way down the mountain road. Lem, who sel-

dom had time to talk at home, told more stories of the "moonshiners"—those daring outlaws who carried on their illicit liquor business in the rocks and caves of the mountains, in defiance of the government and its officers.

Fred was shown the great barricade of cliff far up the wooded heights, where the two Watkins boys had been killed six years ago, when a band of excise officers, headed by the sheriff, Colonel Heatherton, had stormed the mountain, and, firing the brushwood, had fairly smoked the "moonshiners" out of their lairs.

"Looks as if there had been a hoodoo on Colonel Heatherton all his life," said Lem, who had not lived in the mountain air so long without gathering some of its mists and vapors. "The old folks up here say it's because he turned against his twin brother. It's the worst sort of luck for twins to fall out, and father says that Jim and Joe Heatherton were like two halves of an acorn when they were little chaps; you never saw one without the other, and they used to sleep rolled tight in each other's arms all night long. Then came the row, and 'hottest love makes coldest hate,' as father says."

"It was about the war, wasn't it?" asked Fred, recalling Cal's story.

"One was for the North and one for the South; that started it," said Lem, "but that wasn't all. Joe got wounded, and was taken to a hospital, where the Sisters of Charity nursed him, and he turned Romanist."

"Catholic, you mean," said Fred good-humoredly.

"Roman Catholic, then," said Lem, who was a stanch Presbyterian. "And if there was one thing the old Judge hated worse than a rebel, it was a Rom—I mean a Catholic—so that fixed Joe forever. He was cut off with a shilling, and told never to show his face at home again. And Colonel Jim Heatherton got everything, but he has had the worst sort of luck. Both of his boys died, and the little baby his wife left is not more than a bit of thistle-down, folks say, she is so delicate. But how I have been yarn-spinning! Here we are at Roxton already."

"And no sign of your father's boat," said Fred, his quick eye scanning wharf and canal. "Looks as if we had a long wait before us, Lem. What shall we do?"

"Business first," briefly answered Lem, as

he turned his wagon towards the "store" that provided all public needs from the cradle to the coffin. And business with Lem was an affair of hours, not minutes.

Dimes were of serious consideration in the mountain region, quarters were regarded as extravagant expenditure, dollars meant either drink or delirium, perhaps both; for he who spent dollars at a country store must be reckless indeed. Everything went by trade; so while Lem was laboriously adjusting the respective values of chickens and coffee, butter and flour, honey and soap, Fred had made his purchases on a cash basis that fairly paralyzed the staring boy behind the counter, and strolled out to look around.

There was not much to see: only the canal taking its sluggish way through the hills, and the one rough street of Roxton coming sleepily down the mountain side by the blacksmith's shop, and the wheelwright's, the little meeting-house, and district school. The latter stood somewhat aside from the road, as became its scholastic dignity, and was surrounded by a small, bare-trodden waste, sheltered by a few scraggy pines, which was known as a playground, and which served

usually as a gathering-place for all the idle and vagrant boys of the village. About a dozen of them were there assembled this morning, tussling, pitching pennies, and looking for mischief generally.

It came as it always does on such occasions, for as Fred stood gazing at the unattractive scene, a chorus of shouts and jeers arose from the young loafers, and an old woman shuffled down the road.

She was about the most unpleasant looking old woman that Fred had ever seen. Her gaunt, bony form, bent almost double, was arrayed in a man's coarse hunting-shirt and a black flannel petticoat; her gray hair fell in ragged wisps under a torn straw hat that was tied under her chin by an old black veil; her face was seamed and crinkled like the bark of a tree; while the dark sunken eyes burned in their sockets with the strange, fierce glow that lights troubled minds to madness. She had evidently come down to "trade," for the wretched basket hanging on her arm was full of herbs and roots and wild berries, valued for their medicinal properties by the simple country people, who have a wholesome distrust of doctors' stuff, but poison themselves

cheerfully at the bidding of some "wise old woman" like this.

"Meg, Meg!" shouted the young ruffians. "Old Mountain Meg has come a-trading. The boys up there couldn't stand her any longer; they've druv her down. Old Wildcat Meg!"

She turned upon them with a snarl that showed her yellow, broken teeth, and shook the stick she held savagely.

It was the signal for a fresh outburst of derision.

"Where did you get that air bonnet, Meg?"

"Did Bud send it ter yer?"

"She's wearing crape for her boys yet, don't yer see? What's the news from Jim Heatherton?"

With a shriek like a maddened thing, the old woman turned on her tormentors, striking at them furiously. But the stick was snatched from her trembling hand by one, another caught the basket from her arm, while a third sent a shower of small pebbles flying around her ears.

"Go back!" they all shouted, pressing around her. "We don't want old Meg Wild-fire's witch-work down here. Run her back

to her den, boys; run her back to her den !”

Fred could stand it no longer. This was the wild old woman of the mountain, he knew, who, like the fierce wolf-mother, was nearly maddened by the loss of her cubs.

But mother-love and mother-grief, in any form, are holy things to boys like Fred, and his blood boiled with indignation at the cruelty of Meg's tormentors. With half a dozen strides he was among them, striking out right and left in a scientific way that scattered them in very amazement.

“ You mean, miserable cowards,” he burst forth, “ to go hounding down in a pack a poor old woman like this !”

“ What hev you got to do with it, you durned city fool ?” growled the biggest bully, recovering his breath.

“ Just this much,” answered Fred, with a dangerous spark in his eye, “ that any one who proposes to continue this lark will have to settle with me first.”

A chorus of defiant yells was the answer, but Fred's handsome young face only steadied into stronger lines, as he stood on guard before the dazed old Meg.

"Yer want me to settle with you, eh?" growled the bully, who, being the leader of the village roughs, could not afford to lose his prestige. "Come on, then, and we'll settle. Stand back, boys. Fair play while I smash up this ere city mosquito that comes buzzing round us Roxton boys with his brag."

CHAPTER VII.

OLD MEG.

"OUT of the way, granny," said Fred to old Meg, as he tossed his neat coat aside and sprang to meet his burly antagonist, while the other boys closed round them shouting and cheering on their champion in wild excitement.

"Give it to him, Tom! Show the dandy fool Roxton muscle! Duck him in the canal!" while from store, smithy, and wheelwright shop, spectators poured forth to witness the affray.

"Stop them, stop them!" shouted Lem White, dismayed as he saw his friend so unequally matched. "It's no fair fight," he called, vainly struggling to push his way through the crowd to the combatants. "That great bully, Tom Knight, is twice Fred's weight; he will kill him."

"Don't you skeer, sonny," chuckled a leather-visaged old mountaineer at Lem's

side. "I'll bet on the light-weight chap every time." For it was the old battle, brain against brawn. Fred's father had been a college athlete in his time, and he had taught his boy the manly "art of self-defence." In less than three minutes the great lumbering bully was ignominiously down. Again and again he scrambled to his feet and lunged furiously at his slender opponent, only to be met with scientific blow and parry that bewildered and maddened him, until at last the shouts of the fickle crowd, many of whom had secret grudges against the village champion, proclaimed Fred's victory. "You're licked, Tom, licked fair and square. Own up. Hooray for the cit! Hooray! hooray!"

"What did I tell ye, sonny?" said the grizzly old mountaineer, laying his hand on Lem's shoulder. "That were 'bout ez pretty a fight as I ever seen, jest 'bout as pretty," and the old fellow pressed up to Fred, who, with his short brown curls falling damp about his flushed face, was pulling on his coat, amid the respectful comments of the thoroughly subdued Roxton roughs.

"Where did you learn to fight, cit? I say, you know how to strike out. Hide your head,

Tom; that ar mosquito spoiled your good looks."

"Yes, and I'll be even with him fur it, see if I ain't," snarled Tom, as he limped away amid the hoots and jeers of his quondam friends.

"Shake hands," said Lem's old countryman, as he reached Fred's side. "You're a man, that's wot you are, youngster, a man."

"Aye, aye!" shrieked old Meg, who had stood aside until now in dumb bewilderment at having her wrongs thus championed. "And I had two like him, two brave boys that would not have seen their mother hurt—two—two. They are buried up in the rocks, hunted down by Jim Heatherton and his bloodhounds—hunted down like wolves to their death—to their death."

"Come, come," said the old mountaineer with rough kindness, "ease up on that p'int, Meg. Don't go yelling like a wildcat in the ears of this fine young chap that hez just fought for you like a man. I'll lay thar ain't another youngster on the mountain that would lift a finger for old Meg. What did ye do it for anyhow?"

"I've got a mother," said Fred briefly,

"and I know how her heart would break for her boys."

"Do ye?" said old Meg, clutching his arm with her skinny hand, "do ye know how mother's hearts break, lad? Oh, no, no; ye don't, ye can't! The she bear knows, and the she wolf, for men kill their young, but not you—for you're a man—you're a man. But if you've got a mother may she keep you long, keep you safe—safer than I could keep mine. Ha, ha, ha!" and the poor old creature burst into a wild, harsh laugh. "Hear old Meg Watkins wishing good, old Meg that has had only curses on her lips this many a day, old Wildcat Meg wishing good to aught in the shape of man—ha, ha, ha!"

"Come away, Fred," said Lem, in deep disgust; "get out of this before that old hag stirs up another row. You must have wanted a fight when you pitched in for Wildcat Meg. Are you hurt?"

"No, just a little blown," laughed Fred; "that big blundering booby knows no more about boxing than he does about Greek."

"He knows enough to hit back on the sly if he gets the chance," said Lem grimly. "You can't afford to get these fellows' ill-will

while you stay at Heatherton Hall, I can tell you that. It's black enough around there with hate and spite now. And I've got news for you I don't like," continued Lem, drawing Fred into the shed where the wagon was sheltered, that they might speak in safety. "Colonel Heatherton is back."

"Where?" asked Fred, startled.

"In America, and likely to be up here shortly. Nick Williams says he sent a lot of boxes and things up yesterday by Captain Trent's boat, asking him to store them for a few days. And here is a letter for you that will perhaps explain matters."

Fred opened the letter, which bore the familiar stamp of Judson & Judson, and read:

"My dear Fred:

"Colonel Heatherton has returned from abroad, and it seems there has been some misapprehension in regard to your tenancy of his place. He has been under the impression that we simply put in a reliable watchman, who would leave on call. When we represented the character of his tenants, and the cause of your summer in the mountains, he was very courteous and said he would not disturb you during the present hot season (we are having a regular August swelter, and

everybody that can is flying the town); but would only ask you to share the house with him, as he is anxious to take his little daughter at once to her native mountain air, and wishes besides to begin at once the repairs necessary for permanent residence.

"I hope this will not incommode you in any way, but since it seems we overstepped our authority in giving you three months' possession, we trust you will make the best of a somewhat awkward situation.

"This will precede the Colonel only by a day or two, as he leaves on Wednesday morning.

"Very truly yours,
"T. L. CHUMLEIGH."

"Wednesday morning, and this is Thursday," said Fred. "Evidently Chumleigh does not understand the mail methods here. The Colonel will be at Heatherton to-night."

"Worse luck for all of you!" said Lem curtly. "Nick Williams says the boys up on the Ridge have got wind of it, and are making ready for him if he attempts to meddle with them. Long Shaun Dermott has a regular barricade of logs and stones, and swears he will hold it as long as he can hold a gun."

"Who is Long Shaun?" asked Fred.

"A regular devil, from all accounts," said

Lem, "and he knows every inch of the mountain above and below ground. There are hollows and caves where these chaps can hide until the last horn blows."

"Hollows and caves!" exclaimed Fred, feeling that he had been wasting all sorts of exciting opportunities. "Haven't you ever explored them?"

"No, sir-ee!" answered Lem emphatically. "Not with the chance of meeting a hungry bear or hunted mountaineer at the other end. The upper earth is good enough for me. There are holes and pitfalls, and underground streams, and all sorts of dangers to look out for, but this Long Shaun knows the mountain like a map; he used to hunt and trap here forty years ago when the two Heather-ton's were boys. Father says he was a wild young Irishman then, without any particular harm in him. But he got into this whiskey business, and it brought him into bad company, and he took to drinking and went to the Old Nick generally. And then he was caught in some smuggling affair and put in jail by Colonel Heatherton, and I believe his wife and child died while he was locked up, and then he turned devil in earnest. He

has been hunted from half a dozen counties, and Nick Williams says he has taken his last stand here and swears he will hold it or die. And as Colonel Heatherton is much the same kind of stuff it's likely to be pretty hot up here before long. I'll hate to see you go, Fred, but I advise you to get out of Heather-ton Hall as quickly as possible."

"Oh, I guess they won't hurt us," said Fred lightly; "we have only two weeks more, and we can't take the kids back to swelter in town this August weather. And, hallo! there comes your father's boat; we're in luck, Lem, and won't have to wait. Gee whiz! she is loaded up; and look at the barge behind her."

And both boys sprang from the shed and stared in amazement at the sight that brought all Roxton to the doors and windows. For Squire White's "Pocahontas" was slowly coming up the canal, laden with unusual freight of trunks, boxes, baskets, a pretty little wicker phaeton, a pair of tiny Shetland ponies, a parrot, shrieking angrily in its gayly painted cage, a garden swing, and various juvenile belongings too numerous to mention; while behind the lumbering old canal-boat floated a

small excursion barge, gay with awnings and cushions and pennants. A brisk, trim-looking serving man was beginning to gather up satchels and baskets, while a neat, bright-eyed woman stood on the deck with a little girl at her side.

A very fairy queen of a little girl, in soft, fluffy white dress, a cloud of golden hair floating from under her pretty flower-wreathed hat, and a face like a snow-drop.

"Look, Elise; oh, look, look!" she said, clapping her hands delightedly; "we are stopping at last. Look! Oh, how high the mountain is, Elise; it almost touches heaven; are we going up there?"

"Truly, I fear so, mademoiselle," answered Elise, with an anxious look at the towering heights around her. "Misericorde! but it is terrible, this wild America."

"Terrible!" laughed the little girl. "Do the big hills frighten you, Elise? They do not frighten me. I love them, I love them! Oh, I hope we are going to the very tip-top of them all."

"Heaven forbid!" said Elise, in dismay. "How we are to climb such savage heights at all, mademoiselle, I cannot see. It seems a

wilderness. Jean, Jean, is it that we are to land in this desolate spot? Are you sure?"

"This is the place," said the brisk Jean, approaching, his arms full of packages. "Monsieur said we would get a wagon that would take us up to Heatherton Hall. This would be easier for mademoiselle than the rough twenty miles from the railroad. Will mademoiselle wait here until I have arranged for her journey, or go on shore at once?"

"Oh, let us go ashore!" said little mademoiselle. "I am tired of the old boat. Come, Elise; see, it is not so wild; there are no Indians such as you fear. Look, there is a shop and some nice little white houses, and truly, I believe, a church, Elise, even a church, where you can say your prayers."

"Ah, mademoiselle, no—no," said Elise dolefully, "that is not a church like mine."

"And there are two boys," said the little lady, in a whisper, "two real gentlemen boys, Elise, in nice clothes. May I go speak to them? May I tell them I am little Alma Heatherton, and I have come here to live always in my papa's beautiful mountain home?"

CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE MISS HEATHERTON.

THE little heiress of Heatherton came tripping along the wharf holding her nurse's hand and smiling up into the dull faces and lowering eyes bent upon her.

There were mutterings around she did not hear, sullen, angry glances she did not see. Even Nick Williams, the Roxton storekeeper, who had hitherto maintained diplomatic relations with all parties, stood in his doorway, staring in open-mouthed bewilderment at this unexpected arrival.

"Baby Alma" had been a diminutive little atom in arms when her parents had left Heatherton five years ago, and this dainty little fairy princess with her ponies and her parrot and her foreign attendants was distinctly startling to Roxton prejudice.

But little Miss Heatherton, love-sheltered as she had been during her brief life, knew

nothing of fear or distrust. "Come on, Elise, come on; let us climb the hills a little bit, and—"

"Oh, mademoiselle, no, no!" said Elise anxiously; "this American sun is too terrible; perhaps the young gentleman here can point out to us an inn where we can wait for the diligence until it comes."

The "young gentleman," Fred, stepped forward.

"You will find no inn or diligence here, I am afraid," he answered with a smile. "But if you will take seats on the store-porch here (Williams, get chairs or boxes for these ladies), I will gladly do what I can for you; I am from Heatherton Hall."

"Ah, thanks to Heaven!" said Elise, with a sigh, as she took the chair given her. "For the moment I feared we were mistaken in our way. Jean, Jean, it is all right, it is all right," she called to the brisk French "garçon." "This young gentleman is from Heatherton Hall."

"What is your name?" asked little Miss Heatherton, who had perched herself comfortably on a soap-box, and was evidently disposed to be sociable.

"Fred Lindsay," was the good-humored answer.

"Fred! that is a nice name," continued the young lady approvingly. "I had a brother Fred, but—he died."

"That was a pity," answered Fred gravely.

"I had also a brother James," added the little speaker, whose English had a quaint French turn; "he died, too. My mamma died also; everybody is dead but papa and me."

"That is very sad," replied Fred, with proper sympathy.

"Yes," said Miss Alma, "that is what everybody says. I wore black ribbons on all my dresses for how long, Elise?"

"For two years mademoiselle wore mourning," answered Elise solemnly.

"So did my doll also; we were both very sad altogether. My doll's name is Henriette. She is blind."

"Blind?" echoed Fred. "Rather odd to have a blind doll, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Alma gravely. "She was very beautiful. She had gold curls even longer than mine. But she fell down, and her eyes dropped back in her head"—there was a pitiful quiver in the rosy little lips as Alma re-

counted the tragedy—"and then she was blind."

"Too bad," said Fred, with proper sympathy in his tone; "couldn't anything be done for her?"

"No," said Alma, "I cried all night and papa went down the street and bought me a lovely new doll dressed in pink, with a fan and a necklace; but I wouldn't have her. I sent her back to the shop, for Henriette, my poor Henriette's heart would break if I gave her up because she was blind. So Elise put a nice blue bandage over her eye-places and I play with her all the same. I don't have very many people to play with, that is why I so love poor Henriette. It is not as if I had brothers or sisters who were not dead. Have you any little brothers and sisters?"

"A crowd of them," answered Fred, laughing.

"Where are they?" asked Alma eagerly.

"Up at your place—Heatherton Hall. My little brother was sick, and we came up to take care of the place, so that he might have the mountain air. But of course they won't stay up there now you have come back."

"Oh, won't they?" said the little lady sorrowfully. "I wish they would. Can't they stay for a while and play with me? Oh, Elise, do you hear? this nice Fred has a crowd of little brothers and sisters at my house taking care of it. When my papa comes to-morrow I will beg him to ask the little girls and boys to stay. He could not come with us when we left yesterday, as he expected, and the town was so hot I was getting weak, so he sent me in the boat with Elise and Jean. And it was very nice on the water, but I got tired and I am glad to get to land again." And the little lady hopped down from her perch and began investigating her surroundings.

Crouched down behind a corner of the porch was old Meg, who had packed up the scant store of tea and tobacco for which she had traded her simples, and was munching her midday meal, a stale corncake and piece of cheese, when Alma's soft eyes fell upon the wretched picture. "Poor old woman," she said pitifully. "Elise, there is some chicken in the basket still and some sandwiches; may I take them to the old woman there?"

"Certainly, if you wish, mademoiselle."

And old Meg, lifting her fierce, bleared eyes, saw the little golden-haired figure standing before her holding a dainty folded napkin.

"Poor old woman," said Alma softly. "I have brought you some of my nice lunch. Throw that old bread away and take this." And she dropped the napkin on the old woman's lap.

"Who are you?" gasped old Meg, rousing from a semi-doze, and staring after the child, who had flitted away, attracted by the great wagon rolling up to the store-door.

"Don't you know who 'tis?" asked the surly voice of the old mountaineer, who stood near by. "It's Jim Heatherton's kid, that he hez just sent up by the boat."

"His child—his?" With a fierce imprecation the old woman flung the napkin from her, while her burning eyes turned towards the little white figure on the porch with a look of baleful hate. "His child? and she dares come nigh to me—to me?"

"What has the child done but give ye food, ye old spitfire?" said the other bluntly. "Heatherton or not, she's as purty a little creetur as I ever seen. Have ye forgotten that ye once had little kids yourself?"

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"Ay, I had—I had," mumbled old Meg, while something like a deep sob rose in her throat. "I ain't—ain't—a-feeling right. Something's a-hurting me here," an she clutched at her skinny breast. "I wish the boy hedn't a-fought fur me; I wish the kid hedn't come nigh to me with her vittles—I ain't—ain't—feeling right—here—" And with another passionate blow upon her softening heart the old woman rose and hobbled away.

Meanwhile, with much excited broken English, Jean was loading up Nick Williams's big white-topped wagon that had conveyed the Lindsays to Heatherton Hall. Trunks, boxes, bandboxes, bird-cages, garden swings and garden chairs, hampers of wine and groceries, a doll's carriage and doll's house, were piled in until only room was left for Nick Williams's boy, Sam, and Jean to swing their legs from the driver's seat.

"Where are you going to put your folks?" asked the storekeeper, who was looking on. "In that basket-wagon?"

"Non, non," said Jean, "that must remain until to-morrow at the shop, for the wheels to be arranged. We must have another *voiture*.

Monsieur said that we would without doubt find here carriages and wagons strong and large to our command."

"Dunno 'bout the command," drawled Nick, who felt that suspicious eyes were regarding his relations with the Heathertons, and it behooved him not to be too friendly. "I don't run no livery stable fur furrin dooks; I've got that ar wagon fur hire, and I ain't got nothing else. But Squire White's team is down here, and he might give some of yer folks a lift up the mountain."

"Certainly," said Lem, who, owing to the previous charter of the "Pocahontas," was going home with very light freight.

"Shake down those grain-bags, Fred, and make a seat for the ladies. We are going straight up to Heatherton Hall." And then Jean covered the grain-bags with soft rugs and silken cushions, and Elise, with a martyr-like aspect, was assisted to a seat on a soap-box, and little Miss Heatherton lifted by Fred to her snugger, and the caravan started on its lumbering way up the mountain.

"Oh, how nice this is!" exclaimed Alma delightedly; "I never rode like this before, and we are going higher and higher every mo-

ment. We are above the tree-tops now. Oh, Elise, do you not find this charming? Oh, what happiness to play all day long on this beautiful mountain!" And so little Miss Heatherton chirped and chattered in high glee until the long ride and delightful novelty and soothing lullaby of the mountain breeze proved too much for her, and nestling back among her cushions she sank into rosy, happy sleep.

Merry shouts of greeting wakened her, and the bewildered little one found herself before a great old house standing shadowy in the gathering twilight. Fred lifted her out on a vine-wreathed porch; a crowd of wondering children gathered around her, a sweet mother-voice spoke words of welcome, and the little heiress of Heatherton was at home again.

* * * *

It was the merriest of all the merry evenings at the old Hall; never had the young Lindsays found a more bewitching little playmate. Neither love nor luxury had been able to spoil Alma's sunny nature and generous little heart. Delicate health and early bereavement had made her young life a lonely one and she was wild with delight at finding

herself one of a merry crowd. The children chased each other up and down the broad stairs, played hide-and-seek in the big dusky parlors, danced to Fred's whistle over the polished floors. Alma's treasures were brought out and scattered around with lavish hand. Bonbons, trinkets, toys, games, were given right and left to her new friends.

"My dear, my dear, no," said Mrs. Lindsay gently, when Alma, on the morning after her arrival came down from the rooms in the west wing, which had been hurriedly prepared for her accommodation, with a costly Parisian dancing doll for Dickie-bird to demolish at his leisure.

"You must not give away your beautiful toys."

"Won't the little boy like it?" asked Alma in disappointment. "You wind it up like this and it whirls all around the room."

"I know, dear, it is very pretty, but you must keep it yourself."

"I don't want it," said Alma eagerly. "I don't want anything now but the trees and the rocks and the brook—and—and poor Henriette. I will keep her always, because she is blind and we were so sad together in

Paris. But we shall be happy up here, oh, *so* happy."

And Mrs. Lindsay could only smile a tearful, pitying, mother-smile for the little motherless one, as a few moments afterwards she saw "Henriette" attired in the latest French fashions, her blue-bandaged brows carefully shaded by a miniature leghorn hat, seated on the rim of the broken fountain, where Rogue Robin and Alma were holding an animated conversation. Hitherto girls of his own age had been objects of no interest to Rogue Robin; they had ways and methods which he scorned, they "cried" and "told tales," and were generally distasteful to him. But this golden-haired little princess who had descended upon Heatherton was of an altogether new pattern. A girl who had two ponies, a poodle, and a parrot that talked French was not an every-day arrival, but when that same girl presented Rogue Robin with a singing top, a pearl-handled penknife, and a box of pink lozenges, his allegiance was won forever, and then and there, on the broken-rimmed fountain, was made a perilous covenant which only the blind Henriette and the storm-blackened Cupid heard.

"I am so glad we've got a mountain," said Alma, looking rapturously over the great green world stretching above and around her. "I'd rather have a mountain than anything else in the world."

"Is the mountain all yours?" asked Rogue Robin, quite prepared to have this little princess claim the whole Western continent as her exclusive possession.

"All mine and my papa's," answered Alma confidently. "The trees and the big rocks and the great high places shining in the sun—and—and—everything. Ah, Henriette, *cherie*," continued the little girl, lapsing into French, as she clasped the afflicted Henriette's slender waist, "it is far better even than the Tuileries if you could but see it—*pauvre amie*. I speak French always to Henriette," explained Alma, "for English she could never understand."

Rogue Robin only stared; his mind was revolving other and more interesting problems. "If the mountain is your papa's, why don't he drive away Jack-o'-Lantern? I would if I were a man, I know."

"Who is Jack-o'-Lantern?" asked Alma curiously.

And then, while the little mistress of the Manor listened breathlessly, Rogue Robin recounted Jack's history as gathered from various authentic domestic sources.

Alma's soft cheek flushed and her soft eyes flamed indignantly.

"He shan't stay on my mountain," she exclaimed; "my papa will drive him off right away; I will tell him about him and he will go after him with a gun; and we can't go anywhere, you say, and we have to stay right here in this garden?"

"Oh, *you* can go anywhere," said Rogue Robin. "Jack don't ever catch girls, Lou says so; she took me up the mountain with her the other day and wasn't afraid a bit. Neither was I; I tell you, it was fine up there, Alma, red and yellow flowers, and grapes and plums, and big vines twisted into swings, and trees full of honey."

"Trees full of honey?" echoed Alma in wonder. "Oh, sure enough, Robbie, real honey?"

"Fine," answered Rogue Robin, smacking his lips; "I brought a big piece of comb home, and gee! it did suck good."

"Who put it there?" asked Alma, in breathless amazement; "the *fairies*?"

"No, the bees," answered Rogue Robin prosaically.

"Oh, no, no," said Alma, "it must have been fairies! Oh, there are fairies in this mountain, I am sure! Oh, I would just love to go up, away up, where you did, and see all those beautiful things! Can't we? are you afraid?"

"Afraid! a boy and afraid?" Rogue Robin's soldier spirit fired at the thought. Besides, had not the mountain's call been echoing day and night in his ears for the last week?

"No," he said sturdily, casting a prudent glance at the kitchen, where Mam' Patsy was ironing with her back to the window. "I ain't afraid a bit; come on, let's go."

CHAPTER IX.

TWO LITTLE TRUANTS.

ROUND the terrace, past the evergreen hedge that skirted the south windows, pattered the two little truants, Rogue Robin leading the way, and eluding detection with the skill of a small but practised scout, while Alma, with Henriette clasped tight in her arms followed more laboriously.

Through the pine groves where the little feet made no sound, and the murmuring boughs sighed no betrayal, over the brook that was foaming furiously against the dam the children had built the day before, the pretty pair skipped noiselessly until the mountain path opened before them, arched with yellowing boughs, flooded with sunlight, gay with nodding blossoms, a very ladder of gold leading up, up, up, almost, it seemed, to the sky.

There was the breath of ripening grapes in

the air, the scarlet banners of the sumach waved triumphantly, and the goldenrod tossed its plumes to the breeze: the naughty mountain breeze, that was in its most mischievous mood to-day, playing hide-and-seek in the ravines and gorges, shaking the tree-tops until the green acorns rattled down and the little birds flew away chattering in affright, and sweeping down in merry gusts on the children as they climbed higher and higher into the land of the sky. They found the plum-tree bending with its delicious burden and the grape-vine heavy with purple clusters, a little tart as yet for Alma's taste. But she perched on the great rope of twisted vines and Rogue Robin swung her, while the woods re-echoed to her silvery shouts of glee. But vain was the search for the wonderful honey-tree; though the children turned and returned it could not be found.

"It was a fairy tree and they have taken it away," said Alma dolefully. "And Henriette is tired (is it not so, *cherie* ?); never did she climb a mountain before; she must rest."

"Hi!" said Rogue Robin, peering up a sunlit vista, "there, I see the honey-tree now,

just a little higher up. Put your doll down until we come back."

"Lie down, then, *pauvrette*," and Alma, whose little arms began to ache with their burden, deposited Henriette carefully on a mossy stone. "Take these pretty flowers to keep until we return. It will not be long, *cherie*; lie down on this soft moss and sleep, my poor little blind one; sleep, sleep!" And patting the recumbent Henriette, with many French endearments Alma finally covered her with a small embroidered handkerchief, and left her to enjoy her siesta while she scrambled after Rogue Robin, up a stony ledge to the alluring tree that seemed so near. But alas! among the small guide's scouting proclivities, following a trail was not included; Rogue Robin invariably "got lost" as soon as he turned a corner. Boldly as he led the hunt after the elusive "honey-bearer," every step only meshed the little wanderers deeper in the mountain's labyrinth. Poor little Alma at last began to pant wearily.

"Oh, I don't want to look for honey-trees any more, and Henriette will wake up and find herself alone. Let us go back to Henriette." And somewhat dolefully, as older

truants who wander after forbidden sweets, the little travellers tried to retrace their steps towards the deserted slumberer.

"It was this way we came," said Rogue Robin, turning hopelessly astray.

"It was under a big tree we left her," said Alma, looking vaguely around the oaks that encircled them.

"Come on; I see it!" said Rogue Robin, plunging forward into deeper labyrinths of gloom.

"Oh, that isn't the place at all," piped Alma. "Oh, we've lost her! we've lost Henriette! my poor Henriette! oh, what will she do when she finds herself alone on the great mountain?" And Alma lifted up her voice and wailed aloud in despair.

"Don't," said Rogue Robin desperately. "Don't cry like that; we'll find her in a minute—and—and—she won't mind being left; she's only a doll, you know."

"Ah, my Henriette, my poor blind Henriette!" sobbed Alma, utterly deaf to this masculine consolation, as she stumbled along after her reckless little companion, higher and farther into the woodland tangles.

And now a dark frown gathered on the

sunlit sky, the face of the mountain darkened, and the trees began to shiver and whisper fearfully, while deep down in the gorges the breeze sobbed and cried like a frightened child. Alma's dainty white dress was in tatters now, her flower-wreathed hat swung dismally from her shoulders, and the pretty little face was tear-stained and woful.

"Oh, I don't like mountains," she sobbed, limping along, for her soft kid boots had been cut by the sharp rocks until her delicate feet were almost bare. "I want to go back to Paris to-morrow; oh, my Henriette, my poor blind Henriette, never will I see her again, never!"

"Yes, you will; don't cry, Alma, please don't cry," pleaded Rogue Robin, feeling his own spirit quail, but keeping up like the sturdy little bit of manhood he was. "It ain't far now, we'll find her in a minute, we are 'most there now; come on."

And then poor little Alma, denied even the solace of a handkerchief in this dire extremity, wiped her pretty eyes dolefully on her briar-torn frock and limped piteously on. Darker and darker each moment grew the mountain; blacker the great cloud frowning

over its brow; and now came a fierce, sullen mutter that rumbled and roared back from the gorges and peaks until the whole mountain seemed to shake like a great rousing lion shaking his mane. Then, oh, then came a fierce whistling rush, and the trees paled and cowered and bent, as with a blaze of awful light the great Father Wind burst forth from his mountain-cloud lair.

"Oh, what is it! what is it!" shrieked Alma in wild affright.

"It's the storm;" and Rogue Robin, little soldier that he was, steadied his own quivering lip, and clasping his half-fainting little companion, dragged her into the shelter of a big rock. "Hold tight to me, Alma, hold tight. I'll take care of you; we can't get home just yet. Hold tight; don't be scared. It's—it's only a storm."

* * * *

A storm of a far different kind had been gathering on the Ridge that day.

High up among the dwarf oaks and pines and bare reaches of rock and rude barricades of logs and brush that guarded every level opening, a crowd of roughly clad, rough-bearded men had been discussing in sullen,

angry tones the expected return of the master of Heatherton.

"Ay, he will be back by to-night," said one speaker gruffly. "He hez given it out plain and straight enuff. Thar ain't nuthing of the sneak 'bout Jim Heatherton, I'll say that fur him."

"Reckon he 'lows he cleared this hyar Ridge out so well six years ago, that there ain't nuthing to skeer about," said another, with a harsh laugh.

"Ay, and he'll try to clear it out agin," said the long-limbed mountaineer who had met Fred at Roxton. "Nick Williams says he is coming back this time to settle fur good. I was down thar yisterday when he sent up his little gal and a bost-load of traps, furrin servants and hosses and everything, and Williams says there's carpenters and masons a-coming to fix up the house; and thar's talk of the old mines that was ficeded twenty years ago being pumped out with some new-fangled machinery; and a railroad struck across to Roxton. Going ter improve the property all around, and clar the Ridge out agin, I guesa."

"If he can," said a deep, fierce voice, and a huge, gaunt, grizzly-headed man who had

been seated on a rock near by cleaning his gun in silence, nodded grimly. "Better put that in, Phil, me lad; I'm to have a wurd to say to Mister Colonel Heatherton, and I mane to say it plain, and say it soon. This Ridge isn't any more his than 'tis mine."

"True for you; it isn't, Shaun, not while we hold it," replied the other, with a laugh.

"I'm not maning that now," said Long Shaun slowly. "I mane this: that fur away in the worruld, God knows where, there may be one poor and lonely and starving (for he was too much of the big-hearted gntleman to know how to turn the nimble pinny)—one, I say, that Jim Heatherton, cowl'd-hearted brother that he was, druv from his home and fortune and friends. There's a few of ye here, mates, that knew Joe Heatherton, and how he was robbed and chated and turned off his own—and him that done it is playing the lawmaker on us. Let him thry it," said Long Shaun, his brow darkening stormily. "Let him thry it if he dares. There's a 'count writ in blood agin him on these 'ere rocks."

"That there is, that there is!" assented a wrathful chorus.

"And only blood will blot it out," said

a tall, black-browed mountaineer leaning against a tree.

Long Shaun lifted the dark eyes, deep-set under his grizzled brows, to the speaker's strange eyes; they were fierce and wild, and yet with sad shadows deepening around them that all their fiery flashing could not lighten.

"Now you're talking, boys," he said approvingly; "now you're talking right. We hould this Ridge, law or no law, and we do our own wurk here in our own way, and ez for Jim Heatherton if he or his comes next or nigh uz, that 'count will be settled, mates." And Long Shaun rose to his full gigantic height, and lifting his knotted hand to heaven, spoke an awful oath: "That 'count is going to be settled if I swing fur it."

"Ye beant a-going to settle it now, Shaun, air ye?" asked one of the "mates" with a forced laugh, as Long Shaun clapped a ragged felt hat on his head and turned down the Ridge.

"None of yer bisness," growled Shaun fiercely. "I'm goin' alone with Cormac here," and he snapped his fingers to a gaunt, long-limbed hound that bounded forward at

his call. "He hez a tongue he can hold and I want no more gab."

"Best not meddle with the old man this time of year," said Phil, as the man and dog disappeared behind the rocks. "He is as dangerous as a stuck wildcat in midsummer. 'Twas then his wife and baby died, and it comes back on him like the agoo. He's got an old den somewhere, and they say he keeps a lot of his wife's belongings there (she was a pretty tidy bit of a thing in her day), but it would be wuth your life ennymost to cross the door. And when this here spell of grief comes on him he tramps the woods all night long. Ay, man, but he's a devil. Did ye see that blaze in his eyes when we was talking? Shouldn't wonder if he meant to lay for Jim Heatherton and hev it out with him man to man to-night."

Meantime the subject of these remarks, with Cormac at his heels, was tramping fiercely away over rock and brier, snapping twigs and crushing the undergrowth that impeded his steps, with the impatience of some tortured thing. For more than an hour he kept on his way, and then making a sudden turn from a rocky ledge, he pressed an opening

through a thicket of dwarf pines and entered a little mountain glen.

All around the rocks rose in frowning walls, but a tiny waterfall leaping down their rugged sides kept this bit of level green, and two tall beeches rose in its centre, filling it with their tender shade. Under the beeches was a long, grassy mound headed by a cross, rudely formed of rocks, and intertwined with ivy that held and bound it into shape until it seemed a mass of living green.

With a deep groan that was almost a cry, Shaun flung himself face down upon the mound, while Cormac lifted his voice in a howl of alarm.

"Whisht, ye brute!" said his master, starting up on his knees and catching the dog by the throat. "Didn't I tell ye it was bekase ye could howld yer tongue I brought ye here? Whisht, and don't throuble thim that lie below. Ochone, ochone! though what differs it, for naither call nor cry can wake thim now? It's only the poor little bones that I tuk me-self from the pauper's grave where they were flung—whin hunger and want and woe had killed ye both, and I wasn't nigh to help yez, heart of me heart. It's naither prayer nor

tear I can give ye," he continued, with a hoarse, dry sob, "naither prayer nor tear, Katy, for the fires of hate have burned me eyes and me soul dhry. All I can do for ye, avourneens, is to kape yer grave and the cross above it green, for I don't forget ye, Katy, ye nor my bit of blue-eyed Aily; divil that I am, I don't forget."

He picked up the few scattered leaves that marred the velvety turf of the grave, felt that the cross was steady under its veiling, bent down and pressed a long passionate kiss upon the mound, and then starting to his feet, turned hurriedly away across the mountain top, now darkening with the gathering storm.

On and on he strode, while the heights grew blacker and the twitter of frightened birds came from the trembling tree-tops, and thunderous mutters shook the rocks; and even brave Cormac, slinking along with ears and tail down, seemed to cower from the wrath to come.

But Long Shaun's deep eyes flashed, and his great gaunt form thrilled in fierce, strange sympathy with the warring elements.

"Ay, there's a storm coming, lad," he said to his shivering companion; "there's a storm

coming over the peaks that will shake the mountain to its core. There'll be many a stout tree snapped and many a tough root up-torn by the wind that's gathering yon. Does it fright ye, lad, the call of the storm? Come then, come, let us get shelter while we may; eh! what's that?" Shaun paused with the outlaw's instinct as his eye fell upon a white flutter in a bush. "Who or what are ye, hiding there?" With a mighty stride he was on the spot, his hand on the trigger of his gun.

A small white handkerchief was waving on the bush to which it had blown, and beneath it, reposing in happy indifference to desertion and danger, her leghorn hat still stiffly guarding Alma's flowers, lay the lost Henriette.

Long Shaun stared for a moment in dumb amazement.

"Be jabbers!" he muttered, a queer pang like a sword-thrust striking right into his heart. "It's—it's—a doll baby!"

And the finder's firm lips twitched, for long years ago he had spent the last cent in his pocket to bring little "Aily," a doll like this. And oh, how she had loved it, kissed it, slept with it, grieved for it when it came to

a doll's untimely end. He could see the little quivering lip, the swimming blue eyes, even now.

"Some of the childhre up here will be scraching themselves into fits about that same doll baby to-morrow," he growled. "I'll take it home wid me and save it from the storm." And he thrust Henriette, as he spoke, into his huge pocket, whence her bandaged brows and leghorn hat nodded cheerfully as he strode along to his mountain den.

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH THE STORM.

MEANWHILE, the two little wanderers cowered under the shadow of the great rock, nearly dazed with terror, while the storm burst upon the mountain in all its wrath. Clap after clap of thunder shook the heights and was rolled back by answering echoes, while the forked lightning leaped from peak to peak, or blazed in awful sheets of flame across the blackened sky, and great trees bent and snapped and crashed in the teeth of the wind.

"Papa, papa," wailed Alma piteously.

"Hold tight to me, Alma, hold tight!" cheered Rogue Robin, bracing his chubby form to meet the blast, while he clasped his little companion in his sturdy arms. "Hold tight, and let us say our prayers. O dear Lord, please take care of us, specially Alma,

because she is a girl. Hail Mary, full of grace—hold tight, Alma, hold tight!—O Blessed Mother, good little angel, don't, don't let us blow away! Oh! oh! *oh!*” The prayer died away into a terrified cry on the gallant little knight's quivering lips as an awful vision met his eye.

For striding on through crashing trees and thunder roar and lightning flash, came a huge, brawny form, with grizzled beard and shaggy head and gun and bag—and—and the luckless Henriette nodding in his pocket. Jack-o'-Lantern at last! the terrible, roving, ravening robber Jack! Jack, who could not even let a baby doll escape his clutch, without catching it from mere force of habit! Rogue Robin had faced storm and darkness and lightning blaze like a hero, but the appearance of the long-talked of, long-dreaded Jack, was too much for this six-year-old soldier, and his shrieks of terror pierced even the deafening tumult around him. Then came an awful crash and blaze that seemed to split earth and sky.

“Mother of Heaven!” shouted an awful voice, “ye little fools of babies, what are ye doing there?” And Rogue Robin, struggling

manfully with arms and legs, was caught by one mighty hand and half-fainting Alma with the other, and "Jack-o'-Lantern" made a dozen great strides forward amid splintering trees and falling rocks and then plunged—down—down—down with his shrieking captives, into the very depths of the earth.

And still shrieking and struggling desperately, Rogue Robin found himself dropped somewhere in a great stillness and blackness, while "Jack" scratched a match and lit his lantern; *the* lantern, of course, which Rogue Robin knew so well.

"Whisht, ye little ijit!" said "Jack" fiercely. "It's lucky I got ye whin I did; the two of yez 'ud ha' been kilt intirely in another minute."

Then at last did Rogue Robin find breath and speech.

"Oh, no, no," he gasped, catching dire threat in "Jack's" words, "don't hurt Alma, Mr. Jack, please don't hurt Alma; she's only a girl, a poor little baby girl—don't—don't kill Alma!"

"Kill her, ye blathering little fool; faith, it's near kilt she seems already!" And he bent down over the little white figure that

lay limp at his feet. "Nay, stop your hooting," he said roughly, as Rogue Robin burst into another wail. "It's only fainting wid fright the little craythur is, and small wonder!"

And if Rogue Robin had been capable of any further feeling he would have been struck dumb with astonishment, for "Jack" took the tiny figure tenderly in his great arms and laid it upon the patchwork quilt of a small bed that stood at one end of his den. A queer den it was, as shown now by the light of the lantern swinging from its roof.

Bear and deer-skins covered the earthen floor; guns, rods, bags, nets, and knives hung upon the walls, while on one side, apart, was a shelf carved with rude woodsman's skill and upon it two bark-framed tintypes, a pair of small stubby-toed baby-shoes, and, strangest of all in this outlaw's hold, a little statue of the Blessed Mother, with a worn Rosary at her feet and a battered medal around her neck, while below stood a tiny home-made table and chair. But Rogue Robin saw none of these reassuring signs.

Flat upon his face, he despairingly aban-

doned himself to "tantrums," as Mam' Patsy termed a combination of kick, shriek, and fight.

"Whisht, ye young divil, whisht!" said "Jack" fiercely; while with tender hand he bathed Alma's head and face with water from a bucket that stood near by.

Ah, that snowy baby brow, that tangled golden hair, those closed waxen lids, they stirred memories that tore "Jack's" wild heart even as the storm without was rending the rugged depths of the mountain. "Whisht, I say!" he continued, as Rogue Robin's roar continued with unabated vigor, "ye'll scare this little craythur to death afore she comes back to life, wid yer yelping. Whisht!"

"Papa!" came faintly from Alma's pale lips, and another stab seemed to strike through "Jack's" heart at the word. "O my dear papa," with a half-conscious sob, "take—care—of—your little girl!"

"Yis, yis, shure I will, I will," answered the dreaded "Jack," a queer shake in his husky voice. "Whisht, ye young omadhaun," in an awful aside to the still shrieking Rogue Robin, "or I'll murther ye. Here now," the rough voice sinking softly again, "take a sip

of this," and "Jack," who had found cup and spoon, pressed a few drops of liquor to his little patient's lips. With a shudder the blue eyes unclosed and Alma looked up at the rough face bending over her. "Aisy now, acushla, another sup; don't skeer, my purty wan, don't skeer, ould Shaun wouldn't hurt ye; ye're as safe as if yer own pappy had ye in his arms."

Was it Jack who was talking?—the child-catching, boy-boiling, awful Jack? Rogue Robin stopped between two yells and held his breath to hear.

"Shure it's a dark, quare place this is, I know, but I had to bring ye in here out of the storm. Listhen to that, now," as the crash and roar of the tempest came in muffled sounds from above. "It's kilt outright ye'd have been, if ye were left out there."

"Robbie, Robbie!" cried the little one in frightened bewilderment, "oh, where is Robbie?"

"Here," said "Jack," collaring Rogue Robin and swinging him to the bed beside her, "safe and sound as ye are, though it's a wonder his throat isn't split with the scraching; and look at this," another soothing argument suddenly

striking "Jack," "mebbe it was ye that lost her?"

"Henriette!" cried Alma, starting up with a cry of delight, and clasping her lost treasure in a rapturous embrace. "My own dear, darling, blind Henriette! O you nice, good man to bring her back to me."

And Rogue Robin could only sit bolt upright on the patchwork quilt, his brown eyes stretched in wonder as Alma, reckless little Alma, sprang up, flung her arms about the awful "Jack's" neck and kissed him one, two, three times.

"Och, ye little angel! ye little angel wid me Aily's eyes and lips and hair," murmured "Jack" brokenly, "ye little angel, who and what are ye?"

"Don't you know?" was the answer smiled up into the rugged face, "I am little Alma Heatherton."

"And this mountain is all her papa's," tremulously burst forth Rogue Robin, feeling the time had come for him to strike in, "and—and—if you hurt her—he'll—he'll—kill you, Jack-o'-Lantern."

But "Jack" neither heard nor heeded the direful threat.

"Heatherton!" he gasped hoarsely, "*his* child—*his*." And then the great giant sank down on his knees as if felled by the sweet, startled look in Alma's uplifted eyes, and burying his face on the pillow, his huge form shook with strange, fierce sobs. Ah, the rock was rent! all the hate and passion and bitterness, hardening around "Jack's" heart for years, were swept away in the saving flood, freed by the sweet kiss of a child.

* * * *

It had been a busy day at Heatherton Hall. Fred's delayed letter from Judson & Judson had explained Alma's unexpected appearance to the Lindsay family, but the household had been necessarily disturbed by the sudden arrival, and the domestic changes thereby demanded.

Rooms and closets had to be vacated, sleeping apartments rearranged, even Mam' Patsy's region invaded by the white-capped Jean, who had come armed with all the skill and implements of a Parisian chef, to find himself confronted with a yawning black-throated fireplace, and the "ole Virginy" methods of fifty years ago.

The natural climax came when, at the

usual dinner hour, Mam' Patsy stalked into Mrs. Lindsay's room in high dudgeon.

"Ef that air gabbling monkey man is coming hyah to meddle wif *my* kitchen, Miss Nell, I'se a-gwine home. Nebber seen or heerd ob sech foolishness as he hez got down dar; he'll pizen some ob dese chillun shuah." And after a half-hour's soothing argument with the much-ruffled queen of the kitchen, Mrs. Lindsay was called upon to comfort Elise, whose nerves had utterly given way under her efforts to adjust herself to her surroundings.

"Ah, madame, truly this solitude was terrible and the great mountains so high, and the forest, ah, *mon Dieu* ! this forest impassable, so wild and so dark." Never could Elise support so frightful an exile, though *la petite* mademoiselle was dear to her as her own life. And Elise lapsed into hysterical grief that neither consolation nor camphor-water could assuage.

What with poor Mrs. Lindsay's domestic distraction, and Mam' Patsy's huff, Fred, Black Ben, Dickie-bird, and Cal engrossed with the Shetland ponies and hounds down in the stable, Tess and Lou enraptured with the beautiful things they were assisting Elise to

unpack, it was small wonder that the flight of the two little truants was unnoticed for hours. So steadily had Rogue Robin been kept in bounds for weeks by his terror of the mythical Jack, that the family had ceased to watch over the once reckless rover. It was not until the mountain began to darken under the gathering frown of the storm cloud that the two wanderers were missed.

"Shut the windows and doors, mother," warned Fred, bursting excitedly into the house. "The biggest kind of a storm is coming up—one of your regular mountain snorters. It's black as night to the south; Cal says he never saw anything like it, and the hounds are crying and shivering. Close-reef everything, or this old caboose will go."

"See to the windows, girls, quick!" said his mother, who knew what a mountain storm was, "and call in the children. Fred, Robbie, Alma, Dickie, where are you, dears? Come right in!"

"Here is Dickie, he was with Cal and me at the stable; we've made everything tight there; but Robbie and Alma where are they?"

"Out in the garden," said Mrs. Lindsay,

with a clear remembrance, amid her day of distraction, of the pretty group on the broken fountain.

"'Deed they isn't, then," said Mam' Patsy. "I ain't seen hide or hair of Rogue Robin since mawning. Thought he was in the house with dat little gal and her French nuss."

"Non, non, Madame Patsee, non, non," said Elise, in excited denial. "Mademoiselle un the little boy has been with me not at all since she took her doll long ago and went to the garden. I thought truly she was well and safe and sure with so many around her."

"Look for them about the place," said Mrs. Lindsay anxiously. "Ben, Cal, Fred, Jean, quick, find the poor little things before the storm bursts." And amid the sullen mutter of thunder and the rising sweep of the wind, house, grove, garden, and terrace were scoured, while Mam' Patsy scolded and Elise wrung her hands and wept, and Mrs. Lindsay grew paler and paler, as the searchers, one by one, returned without finding trace of the little pair.

"They must be 'hidden in the house somewhere," said Fred cheerily, though his face belied his words.

"We've looked everywhere," said Tess and Lou, "*everywhere.*"

"Rogue Robin wouldn't go off the place, I am sure," said Fred.

"Dunno 'bout dat," said Mam' Patsy, shaking her head; "he been talking heaps 'bout dat ar honey-tree up on de mountain."

"Up on the mountain!" gasped Mrs. Lindsay, whitening to the lips. "Up on the mountain in a storm like this? Oh, my Robbie, my Robbie!"

"Mother, dear mother, don't—don't look like that," pleaded Fred, putting his arm around her; "we'll find him if he is there. I'll start right off."

"Yer can't," said Cal's stolid voice behind him. "You nor me, nor no other critter could stand agin what's coming now."

For curling and whitening the forest before it, like the crest of a giant green billow, the wind came down upon them, and they were in the storm clouds. Earth and tree and rock vanished in an awful lurid gloom. The roar of a thousand batteries echoed around them; lightning flashed and leaped and quivered on every side; the house shook to its foundation under the shrieking rush of the wind.

"Mon Dieu ! mon Dieu ! it is the end of the world !" cried Jean, rushing into the family group in wild terror.

"De jedgement, de jedgement !" shouted Mam' Patsy; "bress God ! I'se found de Lord in de waters ob de Jordan, and I'se ready. Hallelujah, Lord ! I'se ready !"

"Mamma, mamma, O mamma !" wailed the children, crowding around her.

"Pray, my little ones, pray," said the poor mother, steadying her quivering lips.

And it was Tess's sweet voice that led the trembling petition: "Dear Lord, take care of us, and keep us near to you whether we live or die. And O good Shepherd, take the poor little lambs lost on the mountain into your loving arms, and bring them home to us Sweet Mother Mary, you lost your little Boy once, and know how our dear mamma feels."

"The—the Rosary, dear," said her mother, feeling that she would break down under these heartrending little pleadings; and then while the storm raved and tore and crashed around them, the little band pressed close around their half-fainting mother, and prayed to Her who of all creatures has best known the depths of mother-love and woe.

CHAPTER XL

A GOLDEN SUNSET.

FOR nearly an hour the children's voices rose in trembling petition, while the powers of darkness seemed loosened on the mountain, and the old Hall shook with their wrath.

"It's the cuss," muttered Cal, under his breath; "thought it wouldn't hold up much longer. It's come back with the Heathertons, and prayers an' angels couldn't keep it away."

Then at last the awful gloom lightened, the roar of the thunder died into a distant rumble, the wind sank into a low sob, and the rain came down in floods of repentant tears.

"We'll be going now," said Cal to Fred. "The wust of it is over." And Fred kissed the pale face that had grown pinched and haggard and strangely old during the last hour, and said tenderly: "Now, mother dear, we're off to find the children. Cheer up!

you'll find the angels have taken care of them, and that they are all right."

But his heart sank despite his cheery words, for he knew that the angels sometimes care for God's little ones in ways we cannot see; bearing their sweet souls unspotted beyond life's clouds and storms into heaven's light and love.

"It will be a long hunt, I'm thinking," said Cal gloomily, as they pressed on over the terrace strewn with wreckage, through the garden, where poor little Cupid had toppled over into the fountain, and the stream was dashing an angry torrent over the rocks and rubbish that blocked the way. On and on, struggling as best they could over fallen trees and boulders and tangles of vine and splintered boughs. Great pines and oaks had been uprooted, and huge rocks torn from the mountain side choked their path.

Fred's heart sank lower and lower as he scrambled on after Cal, who led the way in a grim silence that was more eloquent than speech. Suddenly Cal's practised eye caught sight of something tangled and twisted round a brier at his feet, a sodden bit of rag that Fred would have passed unnoticed.

He picked it up and shook it out. It was a wee bit of an embroidered handkerchief.

"There's letters on it," said Cal, pointing to the corner. "Can you make them out?"

"Alma Heatherton," read Fred, while a sick pain seemed to strike through his heart. "They must have been here." And both boys looked around them in chilling fear, to which they could give no words. For just here the storm seemed to have done its worst. A great oak lay rent by a thunderbolt from crown to root, while, loosened by the shock, a very avalanche of rocks and earth had fallen from above, forming a huge barrier in the path.

"I guess thar beant much use in going any further," said Cal, with an odd choke in his voice. "Ef they was here they must—be—thar," and he nodded to the landslide before them.

"Great heavens! don't—don't say that, Cal," said Fred huskily. "Let's—let's see." And he began passionately to tear away the débris.

"You can't stir them rocks; it will take a pick or a crowbar," said Cal. "We'll have to go back yon and get some help and tools.

You see," said Cal, whose eye had taken in the situation slowly but surely, "thar ain't nary house 'roun' 'bout here whar they could been tuk in, and they couldn't ha' stood no-how 'gin a storm like this yer. Then this here slide ud have berried full-grown folks much less'n two little critters like 'em." The speaker paused as Fred leaned against a tree and sobbed outright. And then, we are sorry to say, Cal swore an ugly mountain oath that would have made poor little Tess nearly faint. "It is tough," he growled; "yer needn't talk to me no more bouten angels. Ef thar was any sech they'd a-been looking after two poor little young uns a deal better'n this."

"Cal, Cal! Oh, what can I tell mother?" cried Fred, thinking of the look he had seen on her face at parting.

"Don't tell her nuthing yet; we don't know nuthing. Them angels your sister tells me 'bout mout have been 'roun' a-watching 'em, though it don't look like it," said Cal, his dawning faith lighting up again; "it don't look like it, I must say. Best thing to do is just to start Black Ben with his pick to work here, and then you and me s'arch higher

up the mountain." And Cal led the way back to the Hall.

A smoking saddle-horse, white with foam, stood at the door. Fred recognized Squire White's big roan. Before he had time to wonder what had brought him there at such a time, Jean, who had caught sight of the returning boys, ran forward to meet them.

"Ah, you have not found mademoiselle ! You have found no one, no one !" he said excitedly. "Ah, *mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !* and it is Monsieur le Colonel who has arrived. The horses were struck by the thunderbolt and he had to seek shelter until the storm was over. He came galloping, ah, heaven ! like a madman to the house a moment ago to see if mademoiselle was safe. And to hear, ah, *mon Dieu !* to hear she was lost in the storm. Elise has fainted with the fright, and for me, for me, I dare not meet monsieur's eye."

"Jean," called a deep-toned voice, and a tall soldierly man strode out on the broken porch. "Where are you ? I want you, quick."

"Here, monsieur, here," faltered Jean, stepping forward. "I was but asking tidings of these young gentlemen who have been searching."

"Searching!" The dark eyes of Colonel Heatherton flashed quick inquiry into Fred's face, inquiry that his lips could not frame. His face was deathly pale; only that, and the rigid lines drawn about the mouth, told that the strong man was bearing up under a mortal blow.

"Don't—don't tell mother, sir," gasped Fred, "but there's—been—a landslide where—we—found—this."

A low groan burst from the father's lips as Fred held out the little handkerchief.

"My little lamb," he murmured brokenly, "my one little ewe lamb! O my God! why did I ever turn my steps to this thrice accursed spot—for me—for mine?"

"Fred, Fred," called his mother's sweet, anxious voice, and in a moment she too was at the door with Lou and Tess beside her. "Oh, you have heard, you have found something! Tell me quick, quick, my son!"

"Only—only Alma's little handkerchief, mother dear."

"Where, where?" she cried; "don't hide anything from me, Fred—where?"

"Under the landslide that has doubtless crushed them," answered Colonel Heatherton,

pitiless in his own agony; and then he burst forth in fierce, wicked words of rebellious despair.

"O hush, hush!" said the Christian mother, her soft eyes blazing as she fixed them upon the speaker. "O my God, forgive him, and help us to bear this blow! My little boy! my little boy! O Father in heaven, help me to yield my darling into Thy tender hands. O Robbie, Robbie! never to see him again! never—never!"

"O mamma, mamma, yes, look, look!" burst forth joyfully from the startled children.

And for a moment all stood dumb with bewildered rapture, for the sunset rays had riven the last tattered storm cloud, the western sky was all aglow, and down the steep mountain side, now arched by a double rainbow, came a huge, brawny form, striding with giant steps over rocks and trees and débris; while perched on one shoulder was Alma with the rescued Henriette tightly clasped in her arms, and astride of the other was Rogue Robin, his chubby hand clutching his bearer's shaggy hair, and both were shouting and laughing gleefully as their pretty heads

brushed the glittering rain-drops from the trees in golden showers.

"Papa ! papa !" rang out Alma's sweet, silvery treble, "there is my own dear papa."

"Mamma, Fred, Dickie !" shouted Rogue Robin in the proud triumph of a conquered terror. "Here is Jack-o'-Lantern bringing us home, nice old Jack, good Jack !"

"Down wid yez," said "Jack," as he reached the gate and swung his riders gently to the ground. "And mind, if I ever catch the two of yez out in a storm like this agin, I'll ate yez in airnest."

And then as Alma sprang to her speechless father's arms, as Rogue Robin was caught in rapture to his half-fainting mother's breast, "Jack-o'-Lantern" strode away under the dripping boughs, his account with the Heathertons "*settled*" indeed forever.

And oh ! what a blissful, bewildering time followed ! How the naughty little truants were kissed and hugged, and cried and laughed over, while the sunbeams twinkled through the tearful trees, and the breeze whisked away the last tatters of the storm cloud, and the western sky shimmered into gold and crimson and pink and violet, as if a hundred

rainbows had broken loose from their usual proper ways and were frolicking around the setting sun.

"Oh, it's just like we had all died and got safe through into heaven," said Tess rapturously. And Colonel Heatherton's stern, dark eyes softened as he looked at the sweet young face; and he felt that some new and blessed influence had come with these strangers to his gloomy home.

"I prayed, mamma," the small prodigal was explaining to his tearful yet radiant-faced mother. "I held Alma tight and I prayed hard. And the wind was 'most blowing us away. And Jack-o'-Lantern came, and snatched us both up."

"Oh, God bless him for it, God bless him," murmured the mother brokenly.

"And he—he didn't eat you, Robbie?" asked Dickie, who stood listening, open-eyed.

"No," said Rogue Robin emphatically, "no, he didn't hurt me a bit. And I kicked and fought him, too, 'cause I thought he was stealing me and Alma. But he just took us in to keep us out of the storm. We'd have been killed sure enough if he had left us out on the rocks. And he has a real nice house

underground, and there's guns and fishing-rods and a Blessed Mother in it; isn't there, Alma? And he gave us apples, and he can make bows and arrows and little chairs and tables. Alma sat in his little chair."

"And he found my poor lost Henriette," put in Alma, breathless with excitement. "I gave him three kisses for bringing her back to me."

"And what must I give him for bringing my baby back to me?" asked her father, with the tender smile that brightened his stern face so wonderfully.

"You'd best not try to give him nuthing," said Cal's grim voice at the Colonel's side.

"Eh?" said the gentleman, turning sharply to the speaker.

But Cal was altogether too wooden of head to be abashed by the dark, piercing soldier eye.

"Mebbe you don't know that war Long Shaun Dermott," he said slowly.

"Shaun Dermott!" echoed Colonel Heatherton. "Not the good-for-nothing rascal that—".

"Ye jailed tin years ago," continued Cal who, however he might fail in other looks,

knew the mountain and its history—every line. “And—and—he ain’t safe ter meddle with nohow ever since. Dad don’t skeer quick, and he’s skeered of Long Shaun. Must ha’ been a powerful angel that made him tote them young uns back here safe, fur he’s the wust devil on all the Ridge, is Long Shaun; we uns all know that.”

“Oh, I can’t believe it, I can’t!” said Mrs. Lindsay. “He may be bitter and broken-hearted, but, oh, not bad—not bad—he was too tender to our little ones, Colonel Heather-ton, for that.”

“And he shall be paid for his service, madam,” said the Colonel, “paid well. But I have come back here to rule my own place, wisely if I can, harshly if I must. If my neighbors will not live in peace with me there must be war, war to the end.” And Mrs. Lindsay sighed as she gathered her little flock around her, and hurried them into the house, to the big log fire that Black Ben had built to keep off the twilight chill.

This proud, stern man, even in his softest hour, stood unbent and unyielding. Ah, the work of the angels was not done, even yet!

CHAPTER XII.

"THE ONE EWE LAMB."

ROGUE ROBIN with his sturdy health, his stout little shoes, and his six weeks of mountain training, stood his late adventure manfully and was soon sleeping rosily and comfortably in his downy nest, all fear of Jack-o'-Lantern banished forever. But it was a very nervous, feverish little Alma that Elise put to bed that night, bemoaning as she did so the tiny bruised feet, the little brier-torn limbs.

"Ah, *ciel* ! never did I see anything like this. Mademoiselle will be surely ill, delicate as she has always been; she will be ill, I know."

And at midnight the old house was roused by her alarm, and Alma was found to be ill indeed.

With burning cheeks and star-bright eyes she lay in the great four-post bed that had

been her grandmother's, panting and chattering about the honey-tree, and Henriette, and Robbie, and going over all the terror of the day in her delirium.

Mrs. Lindsay immediately took the little one in care as if she had been her own; but her experienced mother-eye saw the danger.

"We must have a doctor, if possible, at once," she said to Colonel Heatherton. "There is one, I believe, at Roxton."

"That drunken fool, Barrows, who nearly killed Alma's mother six years ago," said the Colonel, speaking roughly in his great pain. "I swore then he should never enter my house. I would not trust him with my dog. I must have the doctor from B—. I will telegraph for him to come, at any cost." And then there were quick orders given, and Black Ben, mounted on Squire White's roan, which was luckily in the stable, was sent off in hot haste to the telegraph station some five miles away, with an imperative call to a doctor in the nearest town.

Mrs. Lindsay administered the simple household remedies within her reach to the little patient, while the Colonel paced the hall below in fierce impatience for two hours, when

Black Ben returned with the roan crippled, a huge knot on his own forehead from a fall, and a direful story of the devastation wrought by the storm. The telegraph wires were down, the roads blocked, and the bridges swept away.

"Mr. Jessup" (the telegraph operator) "says you couldn't get no message nor doctor from B— unless you got wings. An' that ar hoss stumble down a washout in de road and nearly kill hisself and me, too," added Black Ben ruefully, rubbing the knot on his usually invulnerable cranium. And Colonel Heatherton, who had seen too much of the storm to doubt Ben's assertion, ground out an oath between his set teeth and went back to the great chamber, where Alma panted and moaned in a pitiful struggle that all his strength and wealth and power could not soothe.

"Papa, papa! oh, come help your little girl; save your little girl!" she cried, going over and over the terrors of the day. "Oh, where is Henriette, my poor blind Henriette? She is lost in the storm. Robbie, Robbie where are we, Robbie? Oh, I am afraid Papa, papa, come to me, papa!"

And so with piteous cry and sob, the night at last wore away, and the gray dawn came creeping over the tree-tops, and the sky flushed and sparkled, and the storm-swept mountain laughed again in the beauty of the day. But no hope came with the light. Two, three, four times the Colonel sent out his messengers. Cal, Fred, Black Ben, clattered down the road on Alma's ponies, only to bring back the same story of broken wires and bridges and swollen river and stream and torrent. No such storm had visited that part of the country for years. Fences and barns had been blown down, houses struck by lightning, cattle killed by the score.

The Colonel's face grew whiter and sterner each moment, as he realized that the mighty, resistless forces of nature had defied him, and he stood alone like his own mountain in his pride and strength.

True, Mrs. Lindsay was doing her gentle best, Mam' Patsy proving an able second with her hot baths and poultices; poor Elise, almost helpless in her grief and fear, could only weep and pray, while the children gathered in the far-off sitting-room and spoke in awe-struck whispers of the little playmate the

great death angel was already shadowing with his wings.

So the sad, weary day wore on, until again the sunset flamed on the terrace and kindled the pine grove, and the violet dusk deepened on the mountain, and night was coming on.

"Mamma, mamma, how is she?" called Lou, as the dear familiar figure appeared at the sitting-room door.

"Sinking fast, I fear, dear," was the tearful answer. "She will go to heaven to-night."

"O mamma, mamma! poor darling little Alma! Can't we do anything, mamma?"

"Pray, my children, pray; not for her, dear little baptized angel, whom God is taking unspotted to Himself, but for her father, her poor father, who is striving to stand in his own strength where only God can sustain. Pray that he will find help and comfort."

"Somebody is coming," piped Rogue Robin from his perch on the window-sill. "It's a man on a mule—"

"The doctor! at last, thank God!" said Mrs. Lindsay fervently.

"Oh, mamma, no—look! It's Father Xavier," said Tess.

Down the storm-swept path came the tall, thin figure that had startled Lou on the terrace two weeks ago.

Father Xavier, indeed ! Father Xavier, mounted on a steady, sure-footed mule that could have safely picked its way through the ruins of a universe—Father Xavier, whom neither tropical tornadoes nor earthquakes had ever daunted or turned aside from his missionary way—Father Xavier calmly coming to say his promised Mass at Heatherton Hall !

For a moment sorrow was forgotten as the children trooped out on the porch to meet the good priest.

"God bless you, God bless you, one and all !" said Father Xavier as, dismounting, he laid his hand in benediction first on one and then on another of the little group. "One, two, three, four, five—none of you have blown away. I have been anxious about you, very anxious, and luckily I was not very far away, only at good Michael Brady's, near Roxton, where I was storm-bound while making a sick-call, when on my way up here to say your Mass. Truly it was a terrible storm. God has been very good to protect you."

Suddenly Father Xavier paused in his cheery speech, and grew pale to the lips.

"Is it the doctor?" asked a husky voice at the door, and Colonel Heatherton, with a gray look of despair on his face, stepped out on the porch. "For God's sake come up, then. My child is dying!"

"Colonel Heatherton, this is our friend, Father Xavier, a missionary priest," explained Mrs. Lindsay hurriedly.

"Not the doctor!" said the unhappy father, recoiling in his bitter disappointment; "then, then the child is lost."

"No," said Father Xavier, recovering himself with an effort and speaking in an odd, strained voice, "*not* lost. I—I—am physician as well as priest. I studied and practised for years among my Pacific flock. Let me—see the little one; I may be of service."

"Come, then," said the Colonel, grasping at any straw in his despair; "but you can do nothing, I fear," he added hoarsely, "she is dying even now."

And he led the way, Father Xavier following through the broad hall, where the last dancing rays of sunset seemed to wake the dark features of the old Judge's picture into

a smile, up the broad stairs lit by the oriel window that flamed with the crest of the Heathertons, into the great chamber where, forty years ago the Colonel's mother, another Alma Heatherton, had in dying blessed her two kneeling sons. The windows stood wide open that breeze and sunbeam might linger lovingly about the little waxen form that lay among the pillows—speechless now, and, save for the labored heaving of her breast, motionless. Mam' Patsy stood by the bed fanning the little sufferer, while the weeping Elise bathed the baby brow from which the beautiful hair rippled back like a web of gold.

Father Xavier stepped to the bedside, laid his hand upon the little one's brow, and looked at her with an infinite tenderness in his dark, deep-set eyes. To him, whose heart burned with such love for the "Master" it seemed almost cruel to keep this snow-white lamb from His loving arms.

But the low groan that told of a strong man's agony aroused him.

"O God, if there be a God," hoarsely whispered Colonel Heatherton beside him, "spare

her, my one—ewe lamb! Spare her to my desolate heart and home!"

"I think I can do something for the little one," said Father Xavier quietly, as if he had not heard this soul-cry. "I have a medicine that is very powerful in its effects on congestions like this."

He took a curious little flat box of bark from his pocket, and opening it showed a number of powders in neatly labelled packets. "The necessities of missionary life forced me to be pharmacist as well as physician," he continued as if to reassure the despairing father, who watched his movements eagerly. "All these powders I prepared myself from native roots and barks and I know their value. Will you trust the little one to me for a few hours? I must watch beside her and administer the medicine myself. At midnight there will be a change."

"I will trust her to you," said Colonel Heatherton with the sudden resolve born of despair. "Save her, and then ask of me for yourself—for your church—what you will."

A faint, sad smile flickered for an instant on Father Xavier's lips, but he made no reply. Dissolving a powder in a glass of water

that stood near he pressed a spoonful through Alma's parted lips, then taking the chair that Mrs. Lindsay had placed for him at the bedside, with his hand on the child's fluttering pulse he began his vigil. The sunset faded, the violet shadows deepened on the mountain, night came on, solemn, silent, starlit, and still there seemed no change in the little patient. Almost motionless the watcher sat at his post, stirring only at brief intervals to put the medicine again to the livid lips. Something of his calm strength seemed infused into every breast; the children went quietly to bed, Mrs. Lindsay and Elise retired temporarily for much-needed rest, Mam' Patsy dozed in her big "nussing" chair in a far corner. The Colonel alone was restless as a tortured spirit, pacing hall and corridor with long martial strides, returning every few minutes to gaze with burning eyes at the idol that seemed slipping from his hold, and then turning away, as if the sight maddened him, to continue his despairing march up and down the old house, that seemed echoing with strange footfalls and whispers to-night. Now it seemed his mother's voice, calling softly from the stair; now his father, the old Judge,

seemed breathing as he passed his portrait ; now it was his brother, who with arms entwined about his neck was whispering the old boyish secrets into his ear.

"I am going mad, I am going mad," said the Colonel. "What has roused all these ghosts of the past to-night ? unless—unless the last of the race is passing away ?"

And then the great clock on the stair struck midnight, and with an icy fear at his heart the wretched father strode back to the sick-room to find the watcher on his knees by the little motionless form—weeping like a child.

"Is it death ?" gasped the Colonel.

"No, no, not death, but life," said Father Xavier, rising and facing him with solemn joy irradiating his features. "Listen to her breathing. The crisis has passed. In God's name I give you back your child. May she lead you to heaven, my dear, dear brother."

"Brother !" Colonel Heatherton staggered back speechless, as at last he recognized face, voice, form, that in his anguish he had scarcely noticed. "Joe !" he whispered at last. "Is it Joe, or some blessed spirit who

brings forgiveness in his name ? Joe ! living, and—a priest !”

“It is Joe,” said Father Xavier, the tears running down his furrowed face as he clasped the hands outstretched to him. “Here where we knelt long ago, at our dying mother’s side, let us kneel again together and thank God for this blessed hour, for the sweet young life given back to us. I claim my promised reward: your heart, your soul, your better, nobler, holier—my brother—my brother !”

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE was a quiet thanksgiving Mass next morning in the big parlor, and around the hastily arranged altar gathered a little band with hearts full of gratitude and eyes dim with happy tears, for Alma was sleeping softly, all danger past ; and her father's proud, strong heart had opened at last to God's light and love.

"Make peace on the mountain, Joe," Colonel Heatherton had said to his brother, "and take it henceforth as your own." But Father Xavier only shook his head with a radiant smile. "Joe Heatherton died to name, fortune, family, thirty years ago," he replied. "He only lived again in answer to the brother's soul-cry, to which he could not close ear or heart. But I will make peace for you and yours if I can."

Meanwhile the wonderful tidings that

"Joe" Heatherton had returned spread like wild-fire over the mountain.

Family history, being the only kind ever heard in that locality, was known well. "Young Joe," had been a prime favorite in his boyhood and youth, and the story of his banishment and disinheritance had been told and retold over smoky cabin-fires, and handed down from father to son, until the prejudice against the master of Heatherton had grown more and more bitter, year by year; a prejudice which Colonel Heatherton, proud, stern, and masterful, had as sheriff and magistrate done much to increase. Wild were the rumors rife on the mountain regarding "young Joe's" reappearance. Some whispered he had been roused from a death sleep by the storm and it was only his ghost that had revisited the mountain; others, that he had been kept locked in some dreadful prison or madhouse during all these years; others hinted darkly at magic or witchcraft.

But all rumors were quelled when "Father Xavier," grave, kind, and gentle, made his way over the mountain calmly, regardless of blockades or barriers, visiting huts and cabins and caves, recalling old times and old friend-

ships, seating himself on barrels, rocks, or logs as the case might be, patting the children's tangled heads and telling the boys wonderful stories of life in the far-off lands beyond the sea.

"He hez been a preacher all these years, hez Mr. Joe," said one grim old moonshiner as he and his mates compared notes in the gloaming.

"And he wuz telling our Pete to-day that he come very near being roasted alive out yon," said another.

"An' he guv our Maria the pootiest thing to wear 'roun' her neck you ever see. A medal he called it, and she's that tickled she can't hardly sleep."

For days Father Xavier walked the heights scattering the seeds of peace and good-will; and then Cal, one bright evening, took his way from cabin to cabin, regardless of creed, race, or color, and announced there would be "Mass" at Heatherton Hall next day, and Father Xavier would be glad to have all his old and new friends come.

Much perplexed consultation followed on the Ridge; a few who seemed to understand curtly remarked it was "no place for divils

like him." But when rumor came that Long Shaun, who had been invisible to his mates for days, was going, that Cal Jones and his father were to be there, that Mike Brady and Pete Finnegan, two of the most notorious roughs for miles around, had promised Father Xavier to attend, curiosity and interest overcame prejudice and distrust.

So it happened on a beautiful Sunday morning, two weeks after the storm, there was an odd gathering at Heatherton Hall. Embowered in sumach and golden-rod and feathery masses of green, stood the little altar, decked with quaint old candelabra and vases, and glowing with starry tapers. And when, clad in strange, shining vestments, "Mr. Joe" stood before them; when pure girlish voices, upborne by Cal's deep tenor, arose in sweet, solemn harmony; when Colonel Heatherton was seen kneeling on one side of the altar, and Long Shaun, with half a dozen spirits equally as fierce, was discovered bowed in humble prayer near the doorway—a hush of breathless amazement fell on the congregation that was not broken until the mysterious rite was ended.

Then Father Xavier turned to them and

spoke in sweet, simple words of the "Father in heaven" who wished all His children to live in this beautiful world in peace and love; that he had come as His messenger among them, and hoped to heal all the wounds and banish all the bitterness of the past. That his brother had determined to give honest work to them all, the old mines were to be opened, new roads built, there would be labor and pay on the mountain henceforth for all willing to live according to order and law. And as a pledge of this friendly feeling the Heathertons invited them to a feast in the garden to-day, where the little mistress of Heatherton would welcome them in her father's name. And still rather dazed, the stolid-faced guests were guided by the merry little Lindsays to the terraced garden, where long tables of board, covered with the Heatherton damask, fairly groaned with the good things prepared in harmony by Mam' Patsy and Black Ben and Elise and Jean; while seated in a big garden-chair banked with pillows and cushions Alma—a pale, starry-eyed little earth angel—gleefully greeted her father's guests.

And thus the light of love dawned at last over the mountain, brightening year after

year under Father Xavier's gentle influence; for a little chapel was soon built in the glen where Long Shaun had watched over his beloved graves, and the sanctuary lamp gleamed like a star through the shadows, and guided the sinful and sorrowing to the "Master's" feet. Every summer the Lindsays, old and young, are welcomed again to Heatherton, where Rogue Robin and Alma wander fearlessly over the mountain, now echoing with the busy hum of life.

Colonel Heatherton had kept his word: the mines were opened, and a railroad cuts across the Ridge, and there is work and pay for all.

But there are still sweet nooks, where the wild plums ripen and the grape-vines swing, and the honey-tree hides as of yore. Best of all, the children love the shaded path that leads to the glen, where beside his chapel Father Xavier lives in a little vine-wreathed cottage, kept in spick and span order by a queer, wild-eyed old housekeeper, whom the mountain still knows as Meg, though the gentle pastor who has tamed and soothed her broken heart calls her "his good Margaret."

Here, too, is Cal, sturdy and active—Father

Xavier's butler, hostler, driver, and right-hand in general.

Here, too, is the grizzled old sexton, Shaun, whose life is passed now in peace and prayer by his beloved graves. But he rouses always as the silvery call echoes merrily down the mountain slope: "We are coming. It's Robbie and me. Where are you? Jack, Jack, Jack! Come play with us, Jack-o'-Lantern!"

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